

Malevitas, Isias (2015) The formation of Byzantine views on Muslims during the 'Dark Century' (ca. 650-ca.750). PhD thesis. SOAS University of London. <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/29809>

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**THE FORMATION OF
BYZANTINE VIEWS ON
MUSLIMS DURING THE
‘DARK CENTURY’
(ca. 650-ca. 750)**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

2015

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Abstract

Byzantine-Muslim relations have long attracted the interest of scholars, mainly through the study of political-military events and polemic-theological attitudes. Recently, with the growth of interest in the rise of Islam and its place in the Late Antique Mediterranean world and culture, academic discussions have started to pay attention to a variety of issues and broaden their perspectives through inter-disciplinary approaches and ideas.

The aim of this study is to discuss Byzantine views about the Muslims and the impact that the rise of Islam had upon the formation of these views in Christian thought (in the Byzantine and Middle Eastern areas), during the Byzantine 'dark century' (beginning of 7th c.-ca. 750). This period, which actually coincides with the rise of Islam, the formation of the Umayyad Caliphate and its fall (750), has rightfully been considered as transitional for both the Byzantine Empire and for the formation of Islam and Islamic policies. Furthermore, shortly after this period, both Islam and the Byzantine attitudes against it became defined and solidified in forms that have long persisted.

A characteristic of this era is the paucity of contemporary historiographical sources (because of the recession of classical historiography in Byzantium and not fully understood causes in the Muslim world). Nevertheless, recent scholarship has drawn attention to a number of alternative sources, including a number of texts often preserved in later ones, which have survived from the period under review here. Some of these texts are the main focus of this thesis. We ask how far they enable us to explore the development of Byzantine attitudes towards the Islamic challenge, and the impact of the latter upon them, as reflected in the politics and attitudes of the imperial centre in Constantinople and those of the Melkite Christians of the Middle East (who were attached to the Byzantine Church). We hope thus to throw some light on this 'silent' period which saw the formation of the relationship between the Byzantine and Muslim Empires.

Acknowledgments

I have been fortunate to have Professor G. R. Hawting as supervisor for this thesis. Throughout all my years of study I owe gratitude to him not only for his guidance and support, but also for his kind advice and inspiration. I actually owe the work itself, first and foremost, to his great patience. I would like also to thank Professor K. Hirschler for his administrative help, during the various stages of my study.

The financial support of I.K.Y. (Greek State Scholarship Foundation) was of vital importance for the completion of this work. Although I have benefitted from many other people, I would especially like to mention here T. Sklavenitis, Research Director at the National Research Foundation, Athens, K. Takirtakoglou, my sister Georgia, and my dear friend Margarita for all their help and support.

Last, but not least, the love and encouragement of my son kept me going all these years.

I would like to dedicate this work to my wife Lemonia for her support, love and patience.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AB</i>	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i> (Brussels 1882-)
<i>AJS</i>	<i>Association for Jewish Studies Review</i>
<i>AS</i>	<i>Acta Sanctorum</i>
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<i>BF</i>	<i>Byzantinische Forschungen</i>
<i>BHG</i>	<i>F. Halkin, Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca</i> (Brussels 1957 ³)
<i>BMGS</i>	<i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i>
<i>BNJ</i>	<i>Byzantinisch-Neugriechische Jahrbücher</i>
<i>BS</i>	<i>Byzantinoslavica</i>
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CCSG</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum, series Graeca</i> (Turnhout, 1971-)
<i>CFHB</i>	<i>Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae</i>
<i>CM</i>	<i>Classica et Medievalia</i>
<i>CPG</i>	<i>Clavis Patrum Graecorum</i> , ed. M. Geerard & F. Glorie (Turnhout, 1974–87)
<i>CSCO</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i> (Paris & Louvain 1903-)
<i>CSHB</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae</i> (Bonn 1828-97)
<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
<i>EHR</i>	<i>The English Historical Review</i>
<i>EF²</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , new edition, ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al. (Leiden & London 1960-)
<i>EO</i>	<i>Échos d'Orient</i> , 1-39 (Paris, Constantinople & Bucarest 1897-1941/2)
<i>EtByz</i>	<i>Études byzantines</i>
<i>GOTR</i>	<i>Greek Orthodox Theological Review</i>
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
<i>JA</i>	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JE</i>	<i>Jewish Encyclopaedia</i> , ed. I. Singer et al. 12 vols (New York 1901-1906)
<i>JESHO</i>	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JÖB</i>	<i>Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JSAI</i>	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>Mansi</i>	<i>J. D. Mansi, Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio</i> (Paris & Leipzig, 1901–27)
<i>MGH</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i> , ed. G. H. Pertz et al. (Berlin 1877-1919)
<i>OC</i>	<i>Oriens Christianus</i>
<i>OCP</i>	<i>Orientalia Christiana Periodica</i>

- ODB* *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. A. Kazhdan et al. (New York & Oxford, 1991)
- PG* *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, series Graeco-Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris 1844-1866)
- PL* *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, series Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris 1844-1890)
- PO* *Patrologia Orientalis*, edd. R. Graffin, F. Nau (Paris 1930-)
- PP* *Past and Present*
- PrOC* *Proche-Orient chrétien*
- REB* *Revue des études byzantines*
- REG* *Revue des études grecques*
- RHR* *Revue de l'histoire des religions*
- ROC* *Revue de l'orient chretien*
- TM* *Travaux et Mémoires*
- ZDMG* *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*

Introduction

The relations of Arabs and Byzantines have long attracted the interest of scholars and, consequently, have been the subject of many studies.¹ These relations have indisputably been coloured by war and military confrontation, while other, more peaceful, activities between the Caliphate and the Byzantine Empire, such as cultural contacts and intellectual and religious interactions, have also been pointed out by several scholars.²

From the late 1970s, the growth of interest in the rise of Islam raises the question of Islam's position in the Late Antique and Mediterranean world and its relationship with the cultures of the region. As a result, new perspectives were offered by inter-disciplinary approaches on a great variety of issues.³ Religious ideas and interactions, ideology, politics, communities, elites, settlement patterns, armies and frontiers are among the topics that have drawn the attention of the academic scholarship. The ensuing discussions were then developed in new or critical editions of several texts and sources, which were neglected or difficult to access until recently. Needless to say, this endeavour has not only involved different disciplines but a plethora of languages as well. Sources in Arabic, Greek, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Persian, and Hebrew have been scrutinised in order to enrich our knowledge and understanding of the developments taking place during that transitional period.

From the late-fourth century, long before the emergence of Islam, serious changes in different aspects of life were under way in the Late Antique world.⁴ Nascent Islam seems to have been a participant in this process as well

¹ Vasiliev, Alexander A. *Byzance et les Arabes* i: La dynastie d'Amorium (820-67); ii: Les relations politiques de Byzance et des Arabes à l'époque de la dynastie macédonienne (Les empereurs Basile I, Léon le Sage et Constantin VII Porphyrogénète) (867-959), éd. fr. Grégoire, H. & Canard, M. (Corpus Bruxellense Hist. Byz. I, II), Brussels 1950, 1968; Canard, Marius *Byzance et les musulmans du Proche Orient*, London 1973.

² Gibb, A. R. Hamilton "Arab-Byzantine Relations under the Umayyad Caliphate," *DOP* 12 (1958), 220-233; Canard Marius, "Les relations politiques et sociales entre Byzance et les Arabes," *DOP* 18 (1964), 33-56. See also the volume: Bonner Michael D. (ed.), *Arab-Byzantine Relations in Early Islamic Times*, Aldershot 2004, where scholar contributions on several aspects of these relations are gathered.

³ Indicative of these attitudes is the series of workshops and editions of *Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*.

⁴ See the relevant discussion about several aspects of life in Bowersock, G. W., Brown, Peter & Grabar, Oleg *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, Cambridge Mass. 1999;

as a catalyst for the resulting transformation of Late Antiquity into what would be later called the Middle Ages. Furthermore, it appears that its formation was a result of the developments in the Middle East, during Late Antiquity, and Islam, as it came to be known in the ninth century, was shaped through the interactions and contributions of different people and cultures.⁵ Boundaries, either religious or ideological, were still permeable and fluid in the sectarian milieu of the Middle East.

Inspired by these approaches, this study aims to discuss Byzantine views on Muslims and the impact that the rise of Islam had upon their formation, during the period of the 'dark century' (ca. 650-ca. 750). This period seems to be of crucial importance for the formation of Byzantine attitudes against Islam, in forms that have persisted ever since. However, the formation of these views and the impact that the rise of Islam had upon it, have never been thoroughly discussed to date. Before defining the argument and the scope of this thesis, a short review of the relevant studies in the field is deemed necessary at this point.

John Meyendorff's essay⁶ is the earliest attempt to outline Byzantine religious views on Islam, through the examination of the available religious Byzantine literature, from the eighth century onwards. However, no reference is made to the rise of Islam or to other contemporary sources. He argues that, beside the statements of mutual intolerance between the two confronting cultures, "a better mutual appreciation was gradually brought about by the requirements of diplomacy, the necessity of coexistence in the occupied areas, and the cool reflection of informed minds".⁷ He also connects the "insurmountable" opposition of Islam and Christianity, on the theological level, to the struggle for world supremacy by each side, in both religious and secular terms.⁸

and Hoyland, Robert, *Seeing Islam: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Princeton N. J., 1997, 12-17.

⁵ See Hawting, Gerard R. 'John Wansbrough, Islam, and Monotheism' in Ibn Warraq (ed.) *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, New York 2000, 510-526; and Berkey, Jonathan P., *The Formation of Islam: religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800*, Cambridge Mass. 2003, part 1.

⁶ Meyendorff, John "Byzantine Views of Islam," *DOP* 18 (1964), 113-132.

⁷ Meyendorff, "Byzantine Views of Islam," 115.

⁸ Meyendorff, "Byzantine Views of Islam," 129.

Theodore Khoury's work⁹ represents the most ambitious and most comprehensive attempt to present Byzantine theological and polemic thought on Islam from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries. His work focuses on presenting the Byzantine theological-religious aspects of the Islamic faith, and its beliefs, practice and customs. The first of his books refers to Byzantine theological works and authors relating to Islam, while the second gives a more detailed analysis of the main themes of the Byzantine polemics towards Islam.¹⁰ The value of his work for the assessment of Byzantine polemical literature, lies mainly in its description and exposition of the texts and the themes of the Byzantine polemics, as well as in its usefulness as a guide to this literature.

However, some remarks should be made, concerning the methods and approaches used by several scholars and Byzantinists. Khoury, along with a number of academics, takes the narratives of the Islamic tradition about the emergence and history of early Islam at face-value; in addition to this, he refers to the theology expressed in the Qur'ān as the authentic expression of the Islamic faith without considering the fact of the late edition of the Qur'ān itself, as well as (later) Muslim theology's exegetical works that interpret Qur'ānic theology as such and vice-versa. From that period until the ninth century, such considerations are of great importance, and issues like these should at least be approached with a certain degree of scepticism.

Moreover, it seems that these texts have been studied denuded of their own historicity, as static theoretical conceptions and constructions that substitute a common corpus that can be put together interchangeably as different pieces of the same puzzle, without reference to time and occasion, temporal concerns and cultural parameters. What is missing, in other terms, is their evaluation as historical sources, with reference to their historical dimensions and causal links, and to the study of their proper genre and position in the whole Byzantine theological production and concerns of the period under scope.

⁹ Khoury, Théodore Adel *Les théologiens byzantins et l'Islam*, Louvain 1969; idem, *Polémique byzantine contre l'Islam (VIIIe-XIIIe S.)*, Leiden 1972.

¹⁰ He has also produced a third work, in the form of three articles, discussing the Byzantine apologetic against Islam: Khoury, Théodore-Adel "Apologétique byzantine contre l'Islam (VIIIe-XIIIe siècle)," *PrOC* 29 (1979), 242-300; *PrOC* 30 (1980), 132-174; *PrOC* 32 (1982), 14-49.

Something that should not be omitted from this review are the interesting essays of Elisabeth Jeffreys.¹¹ Her first attempt to discuss the image of the Arabs in Byzantine literature, in her own words, is “a selective and schematic view,” and focuses mainly on the pre-Islamic period and the historiographical works of Theophanes and Nikephoros. She also noted that the topic, in order “to be treated in the depth it deserves, requires a book-length study.”¹² In her second essay, she tries to elucidate Theophanes’ views on the Umayyads by discussing his pro-iconophile and pro-orthodoxy agenda.¹³

The works of Richard Southern, Norman Daniel and John Tolan are left aside and not discussed here, because they deal exclusively with the (negative) medieval perceptions of the Latin West towards Islam.¹⁴ They admit, however, that the origins of these western ideas are found in the reactions of Eastern Christianity to Islam: “the ideas of Islam which [Eastern] Christians first formed ... were absorbed and adapted by the Latin West,” “the integral view thus created ... had come to the Latins through their capacity to make the traditions of Greeks, of Arab Christians and, in Spain, of the Mozarabs, their own.”¹⁵ Lastly, Alain Ducellier’s work is a collection and translation into French of most of the available sources, which is accompanied by short introductory comments on the evolution of the relations between conquerors and conquered. It is not an attempt to fully evaluate the available sources or an in depth analysis of the data, but rather a brief and simplified description of the historical evolution of the relations between Christians and Muslims.¹⁶

¹¹ Jeffreys, Elisabeth “The Image of the Arabs in Byzantine Literature” in *The 17th International Byzantine Congress at Dumbarton Oaks, Major Papers*, New York 1986, 305-323; and Jeffreys, Elisabeth “Notes towards a Discussion of the Depiction of the Umayyads in Byzantine Literature” in Haldon, J. & Lawrence, C. (eds) *Elites Old and New in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, Princeton 2004, 133-147.

¹² Jeffreys, Elisabeth “The Image of the Arabs in Byzantine Literature”, *The 17th International Byzantine Congress at Dumbarton Oaks, Major Papers*, New York 1986, 320.

¹³ Jeffreys, Elisabeth “Notes towards a Discussion of the Depiction of the Umayyads in Byzantine Literature” in Haldon, J. & Lawrence, C. (eds) *Elites Old and New in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, Princeton 2004, 133-147.

¹⁴ Southern, Richard William *Western views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge Mass. 1962; Daniel, Norman *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, Oxford 1993 (rev. ed.); Tolan, John V. *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination*, New York 2002.

¹⁵ See indicatively, Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 2 & 3.

¹⁶ Ducellier, Alain *Le miroir de l'Islam, Musulmans et Chrétiens d'Orient au Moyen Age (VII^e-XI^e siècles)*, Paris 1971.

By the ninth century, it seems that Byzantine views and attitudes towards Islam and Muslims have already been shaped. A narrative of the origins of Islam and Muslim beliefs and practice is clearly and openly expressed, together with the above-mentioned Byzantine views and attitudes. This is evident both in the historiographical and theological writings of the ninth century, such as the works of Theophanes Confessor, Nikephoros, George Hamartolos, and Niketas Byzantius.¹⁷ There even survives an abjuration ritual for those who converted to Islam and then returned to Christianity, into which the Byzantine conceptions of Islam (beliefs, ritual, and practice) are exposed in the form of its refutation.¹⁸ Furthermore, in the first half of the tenth century, the works of the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus and patriarch Nikolaos Mystikos (among others) describe the Byzantine diplomatic and political views, protocol, and practice concerning Muslims and the relationships with the Islamic Caliphate.¹⁹ However, the following paradox —related to the abundance of this information at that time— cannot fail to escape the attention of the student of Byzantine history and ideology: in the ninth century, from Constantinople, there appear several works expressing fully developed attitudes and views about Muslims and Islam, whereas in the preceding two centuries there had been a deafening ‘silence.’ Considering the fact that, from the seventh century (when the Arab conquests permanently deprived the Byzantine Empire of its Middle Eastern territories), the Byzantines were in constant contact with the Muslim world (mostly in a state of war), and the Islamic Caliphate was seen as the enemy *par excellence*,²⁰ the absence of certain views and attitudes from the imperial centre is quite

¹⁷ About their references on Islam, see Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'Islam*.

¹⁸ *PG* 140, 124-136.

¹⁹ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae*, ed. J. J. Reiske, 2 vols., Bonn 1829-1830, 1, 702-798; Nicholas I Patriarch of Constantinople, *Letters*, Greek Text and English Translation by R. J. Jenkins and L. G. Westerink, Dumbarton Oaks 1973, 2-12. For a challenging interpretation of Muslims' place in Byzantine protocol (as an expression of religious propaganda), see Simeonova Liliana, “In the Depths of Tenth-Century Byzantine Ceremonial: the Treatment of Arab Prisoners of War at Imperial Banquets” in *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 22 (1998), 75-104. See also Simeonova Liliana, “Foreigners in Tenth-Century Byzantium: a Contribution to the History of Cultural Encounter” in Smythe Dion C. (ed.), *Strangers to Themselves: the Byzantine Outsider: Papers from the Thirty-second Spring Symposium of the Byzantine Studies*, University of Sussex, Brighton, March 1998), Aldershot 2000, 229-244.

²⁰ Dagron Gilbert “Ceux d'en face : Les peuples étrangers dans les traits militaires byzantins” in *Travaux et Mémoires*, Vol. 10 (1987), 207-232.

remarkable. This study aims at filling this gap, by re-examining the Byzantine ‘silence,’ as well as elucidating and describing the process under which the above-mentioned Byzantine views were formed and shaped. The target of this study is to explore and present the process under which the Byzantine ideas and views about Islam and Muslims were formed during the period of the ‘dark century.’ Having said this, it is necessary to make clear that in order for this endeavour to be successfully accomplished, several issues should also be addressed and discussed, during the chronological exploration of the topic.

The sectarian milieu of the Middle East, before the Arab conquests (as well as, just after Islam’s establishment and distinctive expression), should always be kept in mind, when discussing this thesis. The role of religious communities, their conflicting allegiances, and their references to and understanding of contemporary events and attitudes will be taken into consideration. The importance of the Melkite community for the transfer of knowledge to the Byzantine centre, as well as for its decisive role in the shaping of Byzantine culture and ideology, hardly needs to be stressed. The discussion of the Melkite community’s involvement is a *sine qua non* prerequisite, in order to understand the channels and routes through which the Byzantine views were formed, and more importantly the ways that Byzantine ideology and culture responded to the Islamic challenge, thus progressively articulating its own narrative about Islam and Muslims. Also connected with such questions, are the views on Jews, the latter’s role in the process, as well as the proliferation of Christian anti-Judaic texts and their alleged use as models for the ensuing anti-Muslim polemic; issues that will be specifically dealt with in the Appendix of the thesis.

Moreover, certain historical incidents, and textual evidence will be re-evaluated and contextualised; consequently, related issues such as the reliability of the sources, and the importance and role of the transmitters will be addressed. It should be remembered that during that period, cultural and religious borders were not accurately defined and linguistic preferences were not always an indication of certain political allegiances.²¹ The

²¹ Cameron, Averil “New Themes and Styles in Greek Literature: Seventh-Eighth Centuries” in Cameron, Averil & Conrad, Lawrence (eds) *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East I: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, Princeton 1992, 86 ff.

interdependency of sources is also another well-known fact, which is corroborated in the work of Theophanes amongst others, which is heavily indebted to the eastern Syriac sources; while, on the other hand, several eastern sources are dependent upon Arabic sources. At the same time, however, there will be a discussion about certain subjects relevant to the emergence of Islam that have been raised by the new approaches, in order to make the context into which both the emergence of Islam and the formation of the Byzantine views about it were taking place more comprehensible. For reasons of clarity, contextuality and coherence, these specific topics will be analytically explored and discussed in due course, when/where relevant. Needless to say, that certain parts of this thesis are heavily indebted to earlier research, the results of which have been acknowledged and included in it. It has to be stressed though, that even the incorporation of these elements follows the interpretative pattern and the compositional structure suggested by this new perspective that this thesis attempts. Hopefully, this re-interpretation and contextualisation of events and texts of that period will succeed in making this 'silent' period speak.

As already stated, the following thesis proposes to study the formation of Byzantine views on Muslims and Islam during the 'dark century', while taking into consideration the historical and ideological frame of that period, with a particular interest in the impact that the rise of Islam had upon the formation of these views. The 'dark century' of Byzantine history actually coincides with the emergence of Islam, and the rise and fall of the first Muslim 'state,' the Umayyad Caliphate. The term 'dark century' (or 'dark centuries') mainly denotes the gap in historiographical tradition in the Roman Empire between the seventh and early ninth centuries, in contrast to the sources before and after that period, and definitely does not signify a paucity or silence of the sources in general.²² Although certain issues concerning the sources during the 'dark century' will be discussed in due course, some preliminary notes seem necessary in this Introduction.

²² See Tomadakis, Nikolaos "Η Διήθεν 'μεγάλη σιγή' των γραμμάτων εν Βυζαντίω (650-850)," *ΕΕΒΣ* 38 (1971), 5-26; and Farouk, S.S. "Reassessing Views Regarding the 'Dark Ages' of Byzantium (650-850)," *Byzantion* 75 (2005), 114-152.

“A characteristic feature of the literature of the Dark Century is the lack of the most social and the most private literary genres: historical and chronographical works, compositions in the theatrical genre, private letters and lyrics all failed to attain any significance.”²³ This ‘historiographical fatigue’²⁴ came as a result of the social, political and religious changes and transformations that were already under way during the later period of Late Antiquity. The connection of these social changes with the gap in historiography has been duly addressed and discussed by most Byzantinists.²⁵ What in fact makes the work of the historian of this period difficult is less the paucity of the sources than their problematic nature.²⁶ The seventh century clearly marks “a shift within the structure of late Roman/Byzantine society,”²⁷ and the literature of this period reflects these changes at an intellectual level. During the seventh century, in all parts of the Mediterranean, “levels of culture and standards of literacy fell as people ceased to learn, build, paint and write in the traditional fashion. This development is reflected in the historical sources for the period.”²⁸

The literature is mostly religious in scope and expression and its tendency is “to remove the dividing line between Earth and Heaven and to create an illusion of direct relationship between the author (as a representative of the community rather than as an individual) and divine power during a special, festive occasion.”²⁹ The dominant genres throughout this period are homiletics, hymnography and hagiography (the “three Hs”).³⁰ The literature of this period has been acknowledged as problematic “both generally and specifically in relation to or proximity with Islam,”³¹ though there is a great deal of it. While taking into consideration all of the above, it seems that the main problem concerning Early Islam “is not so much the lack of the right

²³ Kazhdan, Alexander *A History of Byzantine Literature (650-850)*, Athens 1999, 142.

²⁴ As aptly Kazhdan defined the cease of historiographical writing during that period, Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature*, 19.

²⁵ See Haldon, John *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture*, New York 2003; Cameron, Averil *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity AD 395–600*, London 2000; Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature*, 7-16.

²⁶ Haldon, *Byzantium*, xxi.

²⁷ Haldon, John “Some Considerations on Byzantine Society and Economy in the Seventh Century,” *BF* 10 (1985), 75-112.

²⁸ Herrin, Judith *The Formation of Christendom*, Princeton 1987, 133.

²⁹ Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature*, 142.

³⁰ Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature*, 139.

³¹ Cameron, Averil “New Themes,” 104.

sources, but of the right perspectives,” as has been rightly suggested by Hoyland.³² Events and beliefs that Muslims consider to be important and crucial for their faith might have been tangential during the seventh century.³³ The same is valid even for the Byzantines. The distinctive features by which Islam later came to be known were not necessarily there during the period being studied. Furthermore, the Christian world during the emergence of Islam, suffered from great conflicts and divisions due to Christological issues, and consequently their concerns might have implied an understanding of the synchronous events compliant with these problems. This then brings us to the issue of identities.

Firstly, it is a common convention, which is followed here, to call the Roman citizens of the Roman Empire by a name they never used for themselves or their empire, i.e. to call them Byzantines and their empire as Byzantine. It has only to be added here that the Arabs in general called them Romans. But what is meant by the terms Byzantine views or sources? Or, to what extent is the use of a specific language a sign of partiality? Should the only criterion be the Greek language, or the political and/or religious allegiance to Byzantine (political and religious) orthodoxy?

It is a well-known fact that the Byzantine Empire was a ‘multi-ethnic’ empire, comprised of several nations and languages. In addition to this, as previously noted, the Christian populations of the conquered areas in particular “had a severe identity problem even before the conquests, and the impact of Islam inevitably worsened it” due to their religious conflicts and schisms.³⁴ Recognising these realities, this study is mainly focused on Greek sources that come either from the imperial centre or the ex-Byzantine provinces now under Arab-rule, and they are mostly connected with the Chalcedonian orthodoxy, i.e. they derive from the environment of the Melkite Churches of the east. Having said this, Syriac and/or Arabic sources will be considered accordingly, and as the case implies, because “this complex tissue of identities and allegiances forms the background to the emergence of Islam

³² Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 559.

³³ Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 559.

³⁴ Cameron, “New Themes,” 105.

and helps explain the very different reactions of the various confessional communities,”³⁵ as well as the distinct and diverse course of the Melkite communities in the world of Islam, which however, remained connected with the Byzantine Church. This effort will be greatly supported by the two magisterial works of Robert Hoyland: *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* and *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle*.³⁶ The first is the best available guide to the initial reactions and reports we have on Islam from all the available non-Muslim sources, while the second attempts to reconstruct Theophilus' historical work, gathering all of Theophilus' historical material, which can be found dispersed in several works, in different languages, like those of Theophanes, Michael the Syrian, or Agapius among others.

A final mention should be made, concerning the terms Muslims or Arabs. The aim of this study is to discuss the views that the Byzantines had about Islam and Muslims. Byzantines though, always refer to the latter indiscriminately, from pre-Islamic time, as Hagarenes, Ishmaelites, Saracens, and Arabs and never as Muslims. The names Saracens and Arabs in particular, seem to be the names primarily used by the sources, even until the late eleventh century. While it holds true that almost until the second quarter of the eighth century, the vast majority of Muslims were of Arab stock, things soon changed with the accession of other nations to Islam. Additionally, the formation of Islam in certain distinctive forms was a long procedure which took until the end of the eighth century to be completed. Consequently, sometimes the terms might be confusing, although an effort has been made to clarify any ambiguities. In any case, it should always be remembered that our aim is to gather information about Islam and Muslims, and not particularly about Arabs; in other words, we are trying to distinguish what the Byzantine sources say about the Muslim Arabs, and not the Arabs.

The discussion is organised in five chapters, accompanied by an Appendix. The first chapter presents the historical background of the pre-

³⁵ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 22.

³⁶ Hoyland, Robert G. (trans. with an introduction and notes) *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle*, Translated Texts for Historians, Liverpool 2011.

Islamic period and the preconceptions that the Graeco-Roman world of Late Antiquity had about Arabs. The Byzantines' reference to Muslims using the names of the pre-Islamic period (Arabs, Saracens etc.) is a strong indication—if not evidence—that they had also kept certain pre-existing ideas and prejudices about them. This brief outline will explore and reveal the basic Byzantine conceptions and stereotypes that had persisted from the pre-Islamic period and helped in the formation of the Byzantines' initial understanding of the invading Arab forces during 630s. The second chapter analyses the initial Byzantine reactions to the emergence of Islam. A scrutiny of all the available texts and references is followed by an analysis, which connects these reactions with the historical exigencies of the Christian communities in the conquered Byzantine provinces. Moreover, the reactions recorded by Middle Eastern Byzantine religious figures and texts will be examined in the context of their contemporary setting and the urgent and pressing questions of the Christian communities of that time. This assessment will enable us to appreciate their role in the formation of the early Byzantine interpretation of the conquests on the one hand, and, on other, to respond to related questions, raised by scholars, concerning the emergence of Islam. The third chapter examines the rise of apocalypticism from the late seventh century from both the Byzantine and the Muslim perspective. Since Byzantine apocalypticism comes as an interpretative response to the victorious advance and presence of the invading Arabs/Muslims, it also involves a discussion on what has been seen as a war of propaganda between the Empire and the Caliphate, i.e. the change of coinage. Muslim apocalypticism on the other hand, seen by its supporters as the confirmation and vindication of their faith, seems to focus on the capture of Constantinople as the ultimate prize. Following both Byzantine and Muslim apocalyptic narratives, the historical focus now shifts to Constantinople. This rise in importance of the imperial centre is discussed in the fourth chapter, which attempts to interpret the impact that the Islamic challenge had on certain events, texts and policies, which eventually formed Byzantine attitudes towards Islam. In this chapter, an attempt is undertaken to make the Byzantine 'silence' speak. By a meticulous re-examination of all the available sources, the Byzantine response—in several forms—to Islam and Muslims emerges as the result of the impact that the Islamic challenge had

upon Byzantine politics and culture. The fifth chapter, through an examination of the status of the Melkite community in the Middle East, the works of John of Damascus against Islam, Kosmas' hymnographic work, and the first Christian Arabic apology, discusses the attitudes that Melkite Christians formed towards Islam and Muslims, as well as the information they convey about the latter. Moreover, the transferring and implanting of these attitudes and knowledge to the Byzantine centre is also discussed, while taking into consideration the parting of the ways between Byzantines and Melkites, concerning their modes of symbiosis with the Muslims. The last two chapters have a connection, not only because of the contemporary nature of the events and texts discussed in the first half of the eighth century, but also because of the relation and interaction between Constantinople and the Melkite Churches of the East. The discussion in these two chapters, as well as the whole chronological presentation and interpretative approach of this study, makes the greatest contribution of this thesis to our knowledge about the formation of the Byzantine views on Islam and Muslims, during the 'dark century.' Finally, the Appendix concluding this study discusses issues that have been raised by scholars, concerning the role of the Christian-Byzantine anti-Judaic treatises as models for the Christian polemic works against Islam. It also touches upon issues connected with the involvement and participation of the Jewish community in the emergence of Islam.

Concluding this discussion concerning the 'dark century,' it should be noted that Haldon's following statement always seems to hold true: "for the historian of the seventh century [and the early eighth, I would add], the interrelationship between evidence and hypothesis plays a more than usually central role."³⁷

³⁷ Haldon, *Byzantium*, xxviii.

Chapter 1

1. Pre-Islamic Arabs as viewed by the Byzantines: the origins of Byzantine preconceptions

1. 1. Graeco-Roman background

Byzantine culture appears as the heir of the Hellenistic and Roman traditions of the Late Antiquity.³⁸ The introduction of Christianity in the fourth century, as the third founding element of the East Roman Empire, would function as a catalytic power for the formation of a distinctively transformed Byzantine (rather than Roman) Empire from the seventh century onwards. The period from the fourth to seventh century, which has been conventionally called early Byzantine, proto-Byzantine, or the later Roman phase,³⁹ delineates the transitional period from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages. The ideological adjustments and the cultural and political changes that took place during this period paved the way for the transformation of the seventh century. Since it was a period of change, “neither the ‘medieval’ nor the ‘Byzantine’ mentalities were yet fully established.” Nevertheless, “new ways of constructing social identity were coming into being ... without as yet any certainty as to which ones would survive.”⁴⁰

As in similar cases, the Byzantine attitudes and ideas about Muslims were developed and shaped through inherited sets of ideas and preconceptions towards the ‘other’ that had been coined by the Greco-Roman world and had been in circulation during Late Antiquity. Thus, a coherent and articulate exploration and exposition of the attitudes and ideas on Muslims should begin with an investigation into the ideas and preconceptions of ‘others’ and ‘outsiders’ —and particularly those of the pre-Islamic Arabs— which were in use during Late Antiquity. The description of inherited patterns and ideas towards the Arabs will make intelligible and elucidate the consequent formation of attitudes towards Muslims. Besides this, as will be shown later, the several ways, patterns and stereotypes that the Byzantines established in their approach to and appreciation of the Arabs, have been deployed and used

³⁸ See, for instance, Cameron, *The Mediterranean World*.

³⁹ See characteristically Ostrogorsky, Lemerle, or Jones.

⁴⁰ Cameron, *The Mediterranean World*, 200.

in their reception and interpretation of the Muslims later on, although with a different form and character, as the politico-historical changes and the evolution of their thought-world necessitated.

Civilised societies or individuals, in their desire to express their differences from other people with a lower (or different) level of cultural and/or social level, invented and used the concept of 'barbarism'. This concept was not only a way of expressing such differences but also the superiority that this contrast entails. Hence, inside the concept of 'barbarism' resides a pejorative notion (being the product of comparison of the way of life of the civilised and the barbarian). Furthermore, there is also a feeling of supremacy, since both the terms barbarism and civilisation are products of civilised populations and can be used as ways of expressing their status in the world in comparison to other people, whom they consider inferior. "The antithesis which opposed civilisation to barbarism was a highly useful cliché, and one which served equally well as a means of self-congratulation and as a rationalization for aggression."⁴¹ Meanwhile, it is obvious that the nucleus of this antithesis lies in the opposition of settled life in an urban environment and a nomadic or non-urban way of life; it should be remembered that the word civilisation is derived from the word *civis* (citizen).

The Greeks were the first to coin the term 'barbarian', in order to differentiate themselves from the people that did not inscribe themselves to the moral and cultural Greek code. The word *barbaros* has an onomatopoeic origin and was used to describe people who spoke an unintelligible language,⁴² i.e. a language different from Greek.⁴³ The Latin *barbarus*, which was transmitted to the European literatures, also derives from this word. Although language might have been one of the deepest and most discernible cultural barriers —between Greeks and others—, it was certainly not the only one. Soon the term was indiscriminately applied to mean alien people, mainly Asians, who did not share Greek customs and culture, and particular an appreciation "for the *polis*, the Greek language, and the literary and artistic

⁴¹ Jones, W. R. "The Image of the Barbarian in Medieval Europe," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13 (1971), 377.

⁴² See Homer, *Iliad* 2.867, ("Nastes was the leader of the barbaric-speaking Kares").

⁴³ See Christides, Vassilios "Arabs as 'Barbaroi' before the Rise of Islam," *Balkan Studies* 10 (1969), 315.

ideals of the city-state.”⁴⁴ The pejorative overtones that were ascribed to the term, due to the assumed (by Greeks themselves) superiority of the Greek culture, lead to the Greek conception of the world’s division into two quite separate and discernible parts, i.e. the civilized *Hellenes* and the uncivilized *barbaroi*. According to Plato, these two parts were supposed to be engaged in continuous warfare due to their very nature.⁴⁵ Aristotle also noted that although Alexander’s conquests resulted in the fusion of Greeks and barbarians, and the diffusion of Greek language and culture into barbarian territory, his policies were not followed by his successors and the division of the world into the aforementioned two parts remained in force. Different attitudes, however, should not be ignored, although they never attained dominant status in the intellectual Greek world. Herodotus’ awareness of the achievements of non-Greek peoples, as well as Stoic and Cynic ideas about natural unity of humankind are well known.⁴⁶

Rome inherited the Greek conceptions of this dichotomy and further tried to establish both a metaphoric and literal *limes* (limits, barriers) to divide the two parts of humankind. On the other hand, Rome inherited the post-Alexandrian world with all its political and cultural constituents as well. Alexander’s conquests had brought great numbers of ex-barbarians into the orbit of the now Roman administration and more importantly as participants of Hellenic culture and way of life. Although the Romans applied the concept of ‘barbarian’ to the various tribes that were pressing their frontiers, it was clear that the bequeathed Greek conception could not be rigidly applied; many former barbarians should be accepted, if not welcomed into the Roman orbit. In order to reconcile this antiphrasis, the Romans had to allow the participation of certain people in *Romanitas*; this happened with the *Constitutio Antoniana de civitate* in 212 A.D. Roman citizenship was conceived as cultural participation in the Roman world. It is during this era, that the universalistic or cosmopolitan message of new-born Christianity tried to bridge the difference between the civilised and the barbarian. Paul and his teaching — like Stoicism and some secular philosophies— tried to shorten the gap by the

⁴⁴ Cf. Jones, W. R. “The Image of the Barbarian,” 379.

⁴⁵ Plato, *Republica*, ed. by Burnet, J., Oxford 1902, 470 C.

⁴⁶ Cf. Jones, W. R. “The Image of the Barbarian,” 379.

establishment of a religious commonwealth that would replace the *polis/civitas* and embrace the whole *oikoumene*. It is a great paradox though that the religion, which has been accused by its rival pagans as a barbarian intrusion or as a barbaric doctrine, in the process, was integrated into the conception of *Romanitas*. Moreover, it was so inseparably connected to it that the barbarians, instead of being equated with the civilised, came to be considered as enemies of both religion and the state.

Cyril Mango, summarising the basic traits of Byzantinism, says: “Above all Byzantinism was the belief in a single Christian, Roman Empire. This empire embraced, ideally speaking, the entire Christian community, in other words, the civilized world. Its government was the reflection of the heavenly autocracy — or should we say that the heavenly government was patterned after the one on earth? It matters little. For just as the Deity reigned above, surrounded by its court of the nine angelic choirs and the innumerable host of saints, both civil and military, so the Christ-loving emperor ruled in his Sacred Palace amidst his immense *comitatus* of eunuchs, generals and civil servants. The elaborate ceremonial of the palace, on the one hand, the iconography of religious art, on the other, served to underline this basic parallelism.”⁴⁷

The union of Roman tradition with Christian belief would lead the religio-political ideology of the state into a new orientation. The synthesis of Christian and Roman traditions, which were formed by the philosophical and spiritual traditions of Late Antiquity, will form, in their turn, the political system and the imperial authority, paving the way for a more distinct Byzantine (rather than Roman) Empire.

Byzantine views on Muslims (or any other religious or ethnic community, for that matter) are part and parcel of one Byzantine thought-world, as the latter was formed under Byzantium’s Roman heritage and Christianity, and subsequently should reflect the developments and changes, or transformations of the East Roman Empire. In particular, the inherited ideas and pre-conceptions of the period from the fourth to the seventh century, should be discussed first. Concerning the period of Late Antiquity, it has been assumed that there were no racial attitudes towards the outsiders but that the old

⁴⁷ Mango, Cyril “Byzantinism and Romantic Hellenism,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 (1965), 30.

difference between civilised and barbarian was expressed and felt in terms of cultural inferiority.⁴⁸ Is this cliché valid and true not only for the period of Late Antiquity and, even further for the purpose of this study, for the early Byzantine period? To what extent is this concept right for the Later Roman Empire and to what degree did the existing patterns for expressing ‘otherness’ influence Byzantine conceptions? Moreover, were there any changes in the ways of expressing and feeling ‘alterity’ in order to meet the new needs imposed by historical change? What image of the pre-Islamic Arabs is projected by the Byzantine literature?

Before engaging in this task, however, it is necessary to account for the discussion of ideas on (pre-Islamic) Arabs, given the fact that this study deals with Byzantine views on Muslims. As mentioned in the Introduction, we already know that the Byzantines never call them Muslims;⁴⁹ they exclusively use their pre-Islamic national or religious appellations instead, i.e. Arabs, Saracens, Ishmaelites, or Hagarenes. Such a persistent preference must not be ignored; on the contrary, it should be underlined. Furthermore, an investigation of the underlying preconceptions and/or prejudices that all these pre-Islamic names carry, will reveal the presuppositions for the formation of Byzantine views on Muslims. This will be achieved by the detection and presentation of the most important pre-Islamic motifs or stereotypes that were kept and employed by the Byzantines in their subsequent understanding of Muslims. In other words, in order to comprehend the shaping of Byzantine views and attitudes on Muslims, it is necessary to first uncover the Byzantine views on (pre-Islamic) Arabs, regardless of how contradictory the terms might appear.

The overview that follows will attempt to describe the image of the pre-Islamic Arabs as suggested in Byzantine sources, from the fourth to seventh century. The presentation of the available sources will be followed by a detailed analysis of them, in order to recognise the Byzantine mechanisms for

⁴⁸ See the work of Sherwin-White, A. N. *Racial Prejudice in Imperial Rome*, London 1967; and particular p. 60-61, 99.

⁴⁹ To my knowledge, the word ‘Muslim’ is only one time mentioned by the Byzantine sources, until eleventh century. It comes from (tenth century) Constantine Porphyrogenitus’ *De Ceremoniis*, 1, 689.17-18, where he addresses the emir of Africa as “the dominant of Muslims (*Mousoulimeton*).” The next two clear references (from early twelfth century) are found in Anna Komnene’s *Alexiad*, 14.3.7.14 & 14.6.1.3.

constructing or integrating alterity, and, more importantly, to distinguish the basic conceptions, patterns and stereotypes that, with hindsight, we know were used to shape the Byzantine understanding of Muslims. This overview does not intend to be exhaustive, but rather representative of the main views and attitudes, as expressed in the most significant testimonies on the subject, from the references of both secular and Church historians to the accounts of certain important hagiographical texts. A thorough investigation of the vast majority of the existing evidence has previously been undertaken by Irfan Shahid, in his voluminous work, which attempts to give a full account of all the aspects of Arab-Byzantine relations, from the fourth century to the rise of Islam. This study will benefit from his research, as well as from Jeffreys' brief presentation of the image of the Arabs in Byzantine literature, while, in due course, it will discuss several issues that arise in relation to the subject of the thesis.

1. 2. The image of the pre-Islamic Arabs in the Byzantine sources

Given that the main interest of this chapter is the ways that the Byzantines viewed the pre-Islamic Arabs, it will focus on the information and the emerging view about them as revealed in the sources. Consequently, regarding the question as to how we define these "Arabs" some preliminary remarks should be made. It seems extremely difficult—if not impossible—for specific definitions to be given for the use of this name, based either on the race or the linguistic factor, or even on the region they lived in.⁵⁰ For example, groups such as the Nabateans of Petra, the Idumaeans of southern Palestine, the Ituraeans around Mount Lebanon, the Abgarids of Edessa, the Emesenes of the Orontes valley, or the Palmyrenes have been referred to by Graeco-Roman writers and modern scholars⁵¹ alike as Arabs. On the other hand, Hoyland asserts that "in general there is not enough evidence to confirm or

⁵⁰ Cf. also Jeffreys, Elizabeth M. "The Image of the Arabs in Byzantine Literature," *The 17th International Byzantine Congress at Dumbarton Oaks, Major Papers*, New York 1986, 305.

⁵¹ In particular, see Shahid, Irfan *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, vol. 1, Washington D.C. 1995, passim.

refute their Arab character.”⁵² As has been stated, “the culture of the Near East in Late Antiquity was a fascinating mosaic”⁵³ consisting of the coexistence of several layers of local cultures and languages. Beyond the ubiquitous presence of Hellenistic-Roman culture and Greek language, it has to be considered that Semitic culture had not only been expressed in Aramaic or Syriac literature, which flourished spectacularly during that period, but by the Arabs and in a form of Arabic as well, since the time of the Nabateans.⁵⁴ Having said this, it has to be kept in mind that linguistic and cultural patterns intermingle and reveal a great complexity in their development. “For instance, at Palmyra, with a bilingual culture in Greek and Palmyrene, the temple of Bel proclaims its Semitic roots, though ... it was converted into a church.”⁵⁵ Furthermore, the difficulty for specific definitions is amplified when trying to combine modern notions of terms such as ‘Arab’, ‘Semitic’, or ‘Syrian’ with the actual situation of that period.⁵⁶ For the scope of this study, however, it is of great importance to explore the reasons and the ways that the Romans/Byzantines deliberately chose to refer to, and define, the groups of Arabs they decided to describe. It is actually the potential biases, misconceptions, and considerations of the Roman outsider’s view that we shall try to explore and evaluate, trying to portray the image of these people as it emerges from Byzantine sources.

Ammianus Marcellinus, the Roman historian of the fourth century who lived in Antioch, refers to the Arabs in his work *Res Gestae* both in ethnological and military terms. On two occasions, in his reference to the *Scenitae* Arabs, he equates them with the Saracen nomads telling us that in the fourth century the term Saracen was in regular use as a way of describing the *Scenitae* Arabs: “the *Scenitae* Arabs, whom we now call Saracens”,⁵⁷ “the *Scenitae* Arabs, whom later times have called the Saracens”.⁵⁸ It seems that

⁵² Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, London & New York 2002, 69.

⁵³ Cameron, *The Mediterranean World*, 185.

⁵⁴ Cameron, *The Mediterranean World*, 185; Shahid, *Irfan Rome and the Arabs: a prolegomenon to the study of Byzantium and the Arabs*, Washington, D.C. 1984, introduction.

⁵⁵ Cameron, *The Mediterranean World*, 185.

⁵⁶ See also Cameron, *The Mediterranean World*, 185.

⁵⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum Gestarum qui supersunt*, ed. by Seyfarth, Wolfgang, Leipzig 1978, XXII. 15.2.

⁵⁸ “*Scenitas praetenditur Arabas, quos Sarracenos nunc appellamus,*” “*Scenitas Arabas, quos Saracenos posteritas appellavit,*” Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum Gestarum*, XXIII.6.13.

the terms *Arabes*, *Scenitae*, and *Saraceni* are used interchangeably. Providing us with some sort of ethnological references about these people —“whom it is never desirable to have either for friends or enemies”—,⁵⁹ he describes their nomadic way of life with the scorn and revulsion of a city-dweller towards the nomads: “Nor does any member of their tribes ever take plough in hand or cultivate a tree, or seek food by the tillage of the land; but they are perpetually wandering over various and extensive districts, having no home, no fixed abode or laws; nor can they endure to remain long in the same climate, no one district or country pleasing them for a continuance. Their life is one continued wandering”.⁶⁰ He also does not fail to mention their rapacious raids and the fact that they live by hunting and from their flocks. This contrast between nomads and city-dwellers becomes more evident in the part of his work, where he describes in a favourable way the sedentary life of the inhabitants of South Arabia.⁶¹ Moreover, he informs us about their custom of temporary marriage, without neglecting to insert an acrimonious comment about their ‘licentious’ behaviour: “it is inconceivable with what eagerness the individuals of both sexes give themselves up to matrimonial pleasures,” which is a common accusation against savage and barbarous people who lack the morals and right conduct of civilised populations. Quite expressively, he brings this section to a close with the characterisation of the Saracens as *natio perniciosa* (pernicious nation).⁶² Although he recognises their martial skills,⁶³ he does not assign them an important role in their participation in the defence of Constantinople during its siege by the Goths in 378. On the contrary, he prefers to undermine their —actually effective and successful— contribution by not mentioning it directly and by citing just one incident that clearly depicts their horrible and barbaric bloodthirsty instincts.⁶⁴ Having said this, it should be remarked on, as Jeffreys has rightly pointed out,⁶⁵ that these accounts about the Saracens have their parallels in the description of the Huns and Alans within Ammianus’ history; both these tribes are referred to using

⁵⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum Gestarum*, XIV.4.1.

⁶⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum Gestarum*, XIV.4.3-4.

⁶¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum Gestarum*, XXIII.6.45-47.

⁶² Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum Gestarum*, XIV.4.7.

⁶³ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum Gestarum*, XIV.4.3.

⁶⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum Gestarum*, XXXI.16.6.

⁶⁵ Jeffreys, “The Image of the Arabs,” 307.

similar wording like the Saracens. This safe indication corroborates the fact that the historian is following a stereotyped pattern for representing barbarians, who are beyond the limits of non-urban culture.

Zosimus, expressing probably his strong feelings for the decline of the Roman Empire, says on the ascension of Philip the Arab, in an unquestionably racial tone, that Philip “was a native of Arabia, a wicked nation.”⁶⁶ Although Zosimus’ hostility towards Philip might originate in Philip’s Christianity (even if there is not even the slightest hint at this in his *Historia Nova*) and not in his ethnic origin,⁶⁷ it seems more plausible that the ascent of both a Christian and barbarian emperor to the Roman throne might have invoked in him such an intense expression of condemnation.⁶⁸ To such an attitude also seems to allude his reference to the answer given by the Oracle of Apollo to the Palmyrenes when asking about the hegemony of the East: “out of my sacred fane, deceitful, baneful men, who cause pain to the glorious race of the immortals [i.e. Gods].”⁶⁹ The second verse refers to the revolt of the Palmyrenes (city-dwellers, who are never referred to as barbarians) against the Romans, who are labelled as the “race of Gods”! In general, Zosimus does not seem to pay any particular attention to the ethnic background of the Saracens and this is quite obvious in his balanced reference to the participation of the Saracens in the Gothic war of 378, emphasising their skill in horsemanship.⁷⁰

Just after the investigation of the two pagan historians of the Later Roman Empire, it is interesting to see how the Church historians of the fourth and fifth centuries present the Arabs. The most striking feature in Eusebius’ work is the connection of the Arabs with the Biblical background and figures. In his *Chronikon* (in Jerome’s version), his contemporary Arabs are perceived as being Ishmaelites, descendants of Hagar: “through his slave Hagar, Abraham fathers Ishmael, from whom comes the race of Ishmaelites, later called Hagarenes, and consequently Saracens.”⁷¹ Although Eusebius identifies the

⁶⁶ “*Ormomenos gar ex Arabias, ethnous heirstou,*” Zosimus, *Historia nova*, ed. by Paschoud, F., Paris 1971-1989, 1.18.3.

⁶⁷ As Jeffreys suggests, “The Image of the Arabs,” 307.

⁶⁸ Cf. Shahid, *Rome and the Arabs*, 114ff.

⁶⁹ Zosimus, *Historia nova*, 1.57.4.

⁷⁰ Zosimus, *Historia nova*, IV.22.2-3.

⁷¹ “*Abraham ex ancilla Agar generat Ishmael, a quo Ishmaelitarum genus, qui postea Agareni et ad postremum Saraceni dicti,*” *Die Chronik des Hieronymus*, ed. by Helms, R. C., Berlin 1956, 24a.

Saracens of his time with the Biblical Ishmaelites —from the seed of Abraham—, he clearly states that they were the offspring of the bond-maid Hagar, opposed to Isaac the promised son from the free woman.⁷² Thus, the Saracens are left “out of the promises” and the Covenant. Furthermore, they are usually referred to as barbarians, pagans practising sacrifice of a boy every year to an evil demon;⁷³ even when they adopt Christianity, they are shown as introducers of heresy.⁷⁴ Their barbaric laws were changed by the Romans, when they conquered their country.⁷⁵ He also mentions the custom, in use in Arabia and Osroene, to put to death not only women that committed adultery but also to punish even the ones suspected of adultery.⁷⁶ Supporting the statement of Josephus,⁷⁷ he informs us of the (probable existence of it as well, from the first century A.D.?) rite of circumcision for Ishmaelites at the age of thirteen.⁷⁸

In the fifth-century works of Socrates, Theodoret, and especially Sozomen, the polemical attitude toward the Arabs seems to have receded and Arabs are presented in a different light. A common element appearing in the historical narratives of all three ecclesiastical historians is the mention of the incidents concerning Mavia, Queen of the Saracens, as well as the reports on the Christianisation of the Arabs. The Saracen Christian Queen Mavia put pressure on the Byzantines —threatening them even with war— in order to achieve the ordination of an ascetic called Moses as a bishop for her Saracen Christian people.⁷⁹ Furthermore, both Socrates and Sozomen refer to the Saracens’ participation in the Gothic war in 378 at the side of Byzantines, as *foederati* sent by Queen Mavia.⁸⁰

⁷² *Die Chronik des Hieronymus*, ed. by Helms, R. C., Berlin 1956, p. 24c.

⁷³ Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*, ed. by Mras, K., Berlin 1954, 4.16.8-9.

⁷⁴ “*Allo d’ au palin epi tes Arabias kata ton deloumenon epifyontai hronon dogmatos allotriou tes aletheias eisegetai*,” Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. by Bardy, G., Paris 1952-1967, 6.37.1.

⁷⁵ “*hthes hoi Romaioi tes Arabias kratesantes tous ton barbaron nomous ellaxan*,” Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*, 6.10.41.

⁷⁶ Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*, 6.10.22-23.

⁷⁷ Josephus, *Ant. Jud.*, I.214.3-6. For his reference on Ishmaelites, see Millar, Fergus “Hagar, Ishmael, Josephus and the Origins of Islam,” *JJS* 44 (1993), 23-45.

⁷⁸ “*ton de en Ismaelitis tois kata ten Arabian toionde os pantas peritemnesthai trikaidekaetis. touto gar istoretai peri auton*,” Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*, 6.11.69-70.

⁷⁹ Socrates, *Hist. Eccl.*, IV.36.1-13. For Sozomen’s and Theodoret’s longer accounts see, Sozomenus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. by Hansen, G.C., Berlin, 1960., VI.38.1-9 and *Hist. Eccl.*, 261-262 respectively.

⁸⁰ *Hist. Eccles.*, V.1.10.

Sozomen's extensive account about the Saracens is the most important and valuable report on Arabs found in the works of the ecclesiastical historians. The importance of this account lies in the fact that it elucidates to the development of the Arabs' religious history and life between Biblical times and the emergence of Islam, as well as their relationship with the Byzantines in the second half of the fourth century. Thus, according to Sozomen, the Arabs were called Ishmaelites, because of their progenitor Ishmael, son of Abraham. They assumed the name Saracens in order to conceal the opprobrium of their origin from a slave woman (Hagar), the mother of Ishmael. By adopting the name Saracens, they attached themselves to Sarah (the free and legitimate wife of Abraham), as her descendants. Like the Jews, they practise circumcision and they abstain from eating pork, whilst observing many other Jewish rites and customs. If the Ishmaelites deviate in any way from Jewish customs, it is due to the lapse of time and their intercourse with neighbouring nations, which lead to the corruption of their father's Ishmael ancestral way of life. But some of them, afterwards, happened to come into contact with Jews, from whom they gathered the facts of their origin, and returned to their kinsmen allying themselves to Jewish customs and laws. From that time on until now, many of them regulate their way of life according to the Jewish customs. Not long before the reign of the then king, they started being proselytised to Christianity, due to their contacts with the neighbouring priests and monks; it is also said that a whole tribe, and their chief Zokomos, converted to Christianity.⁸¹ Theodoret, on the other hand, talking about the Saracens' conversion to Christianity, says that they abandoned their idolatrous beliefs and Aphrodite's cult, in particular, which they had always practised.⁸² It should be added that Sozomen mentions the existence of Saracen victory songs and the importance of children to them ("and to all barbarians").⁸³

In general, the references from these centuries about the Arabs lack any polemical intentions and are sympathetic. This is vividly described in

⁸¹ Sozomenus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, VI.38.10-14. This reference of Sozomen on Ismaelites and their origin, has been considered, by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, of great importance for the exploration of the emergence of Islam. See Cook, Michael *Muhammad*, Oxford 1996, 81, 92.

⁸² *Hist. Rel.*, 26.t.1.

⁸³ Sozomenus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, VI.38.5, 15.

Theodoret's narrative about St. Symeon the Stylite, where he talks about hundreds of Arabs approaching and asking for the saint's intervention, their petitions and the miracles worked upon them — as well as their conversion to Christianity.⁸⁴ Furthermore, he describes them as having “sagacity, prudence and intelligence and a judgement capable of discerning truth and refuting falsehood”.⁸⁵ In the fifth century, the terms Hagarenes and Ishmaelites are used almost solely by Theodoret, (who also refers to the Saracens as nomads and tent-dwellers⁸⁶), but, even in this case, they are mostly used as Biblical names and they do not seem to have any pejorative colouring. The name that has been used for them, almost exclusively, is Saracens.⁸⁷

In the two major historical sources of the sixth century, the historian Procopius and the chronicler Malalas, the main references to Arabs deal with the Arab federates Ghassānids, allies of the Byzantines, and the Lakhmids,⁸⁸ allies of the Persians, who both functioned as buffers for the Byzantine and Persian Empires respectively. The predominant Saracen figures in Procopius account of the Persian Wars are the Lakhmid leader al-Mundhir (*Alamoundaros*) and the Ghassānid al-Ḥārith (*Arethas*). Al-Mundhir is presented as being capable of giving sagacious and military advice,⁸⁹ wise and experienced in war, thoroughly loyal to his Persian suzerains, an extremely energetic man who for a period of forty years forced the Romans to bend their knees.⁹⁰ On the other hand, this shrewd barbarian is presented as a merciless and cruel enemy who plundered and pillaged the Byzantine territory.⁹¹ On one occasion though, Procopius describes him as being cowardly retreating in front of Belisarius and his Saracens' advance. After the portrayal of al-Mundhir, Procopius turns to al-Ḥārith and reports that Justinian bestowed on him the title of *basileus* of the federate Arabs, as a means to oppose the dangerous al-Mundhir, though “Alamoundaros continued to injure the Romans just as much as before, if not more, since Arethas was either

⁸⁴ *Hist. Rel.*, 26.t.1.

⁸⁵ *Curatio*, 5.73.2-74.1.

⁸⁶ See *Interp. Jer.*, 81.736.3-5.

⁸⁷ “*tois Ismaelitis, tois nun kaloumenois Sarakenois*,” *Interp. Jer.*, 81.733.89.

⁸⁸ For which see the relevant articles by Shahid, Irfan in *EF*², where further bibliography is to be found.

⁸⁹ *De Bell.*, I.17.30-39.

⁹⁰ *De Bell.*, I.17.40-41.

⁹¹ *De Bell.*, I.17.41-43.

extremely unfortunate in every inroad and every conflict, or else he turned traitor as quickly as he could”.⁹² Even the time sequence of presentation of the two opposing leaders hints that al-Mundhir’s “main role for Prokopios seems arguably to be that of a foil to al-Ḥārith” as Jeffreys has pointed out.⁹³ Furthermore, the use of the word *kataprodidontos* (superlative and emphasising expression for treason) introduces us to the major issue that Procopius’ narrative of al-Ḥārith has raised; specifically Procopius has been accused of wilfully distorting al-Ḥārith’s personality and his role in the Persian wars, due to his *Kaiserkritik* and his will to defend Belisarius — whose secretary Procopius was— against charges of military failures at Callinikon and at Sisauranon.⁹⁴ Accordingly, al-Ḥārith’s portrayal by Procopius, under the charge of *prodosia* for his role in the battle of Callinikon and the siege of Sisauranon, presents him as being an insufficient warrior and a treacherous and unreliable ally.⁹⁵ While the discussion of this argument is beyond the scope of this study, it has to be said that, although Procopius “is in fact our main source for the career of al-Harith and the beginnings of the Ghassānid dynasty ... as always, he is more interested in the personal than the wider view.”⁹⁶ On the other hand, the growing interest of the Arab federate presence in the Byzantine borders/*limes* and the ways that two opposite Arab leaders are portrayed has to be underlined.

The theme of *prodosia* is also found in Malalas’ *Chronographia* but, in the battle of Callinikon, the flight of the Roman Saracens is credited to all the Arab phylarchs’ treachery, while al-Ḥārith, with some Saracens, remained fighting.⁹⁷ Then again, there is another mention of al-Mundhir’s character as ruthless, brutal and greedy,⁹⁸ as well as cowardly, due to his retreat before the presence of a strong Byzantine army.⁹⁹ In the field of sixth-century ecclesiastical history, Evagrius refers to al-Mundhir the Ghassānid (son of al-

⁹² *De Bell.*, I.17.47.

⁹³ Jeffreys, “The Image of the Arabs,” 308.

⁹⁴ See Cameron, Averil *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, London 1985, 125; and Shahid’s works, specifically *Byzantines and Arabs in the Sixth Century*, 220-226, 297-306, where he provides also the bibliography (of his articles) about the case.

⁹⁵ *De Bell.*, I.18.36, and II.19.12-13.

⁹⁶ Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, 126.

⁹⁷ *Chronog.*, 464.

⁹⁸ *Chronog.*, 460.

⁹⁹ *Chronog.*, 435.

Hārith) as the “barbarian leader of the Scenitae” and accuses him of treachery because he did not cross the Euphrates in support of Maurice.¹⁰⁰ As for the Lakhmid Nu‘mān “the hideous and vile heathen, who had offered human sacrifice, slaughtered by his hands, to his gods,” he thinks it as important to mention that he converted, although to the Nestorian creed.¹⁰¹

The late sixth century references to the Arabs close with the works of Menander Protector and Theophylact Simocatta. Menander,¹⁰² referring to the peace treaty of 561 signed between the Byzantines and the Persians, presents the Saracens as part of all the eastern barbarians “Saracens and the assortment of all the other barbarians”.¹⁰³ He talks about them as being “leaderless desert people, subjects of the Roman or Persian state,” who are greedy in their continuing requests for gifts from the emperor.¹⁰⁴ Beyond such sort of sporadic mentions, there is no evidence for a deeper knowledge of their culture or a sign of specific hostility.¹⁰⁵ Theophylact Simocatta on the other hand, relying on Greek sources (though distorting some of his information due to his biases),¹⁰⁶ reports that the Ghassānid al-Mundhir (as it was said) revealed to the Persians, the Roman attack against Ctesiphon in 581, thus destroying Maurice’s enterprise. In this account, he says that “the Saracen tribe is known to be the most unreliable and fickle, their mind is not steadfast and their judgement is not firmly grounded in prudence”.¹⁰⁷

Finally, this presentation of Byzantine sources on the pre-Islamic Arabs will conclude with a brief examination of the information provided by the hagiographical genre of Byzantine literature, and specifically the sixth-century works of Nilus and Cyril of Scythopolis. The former’s *Narrationes* refer to the area of the Sinai Peninsula and the town of Pharan. There, apart from the

¹⁰⁰ Evagrius Scholasticus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. by Bidez, J. and Parmentier, L., London 1898, V.20.

¹⁰¹ Evagrius Scholasticus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, VI. 22.

¹⁰² See Blockley, R. C. (ed. and trans.) *The History of Menander the Guardsman*, Liverpool 1985.

¹⁰³ *De legat. Roman.*, 3.304.

¹⁰⁴ *De legat. Roman.*, 5.28,58.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Jeffreys, “The Image of the Arabs,” 310.

¹⁰⁶ See Whitby, Michael & Mary *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, Oxford 1986, xxv.

¹⁰⁷ “apistotaton gar kai alloprosallon to Saracenikon fylon kathesteke pagion te ton noun kai ten gnomen pros to sofron idrymenen ouk ehon,” Theophylactus Simocatta, *Historiae*, ed. by Boor, C., Leipzig 1887, III. 17.6-8). Trans. by Whitby, *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, 99-100.

description of the idolatrous religion and the customs of the Arabs,¹⁰⁸ there are references to the raids of Saracen nomads, resulting in the massacre of monks, and to the treaties (*foedus*) between them and the local population. As is implied by the text, there were still pagan pockets in the Peninsula, which consequently made their presence evident either as marauding Saracens or as concluding treaties (*spondai, foedus*) with the local inhabitants, to whom the author interchangeably refers as barbarians.

The hagiographical work of Cyril is informative about the process of Christianisation (which, in most cases, comes as a result of the miraculous intervention of the ascetics) and the status of the Church of the Parembolē (*Parembolai*) in the Jordan Valley.¹⁰⁹ What is of great importance for this overview, however, is the fact that the hagiographer observes a distinction between the non-Christian Arabs and the baptised Christian Arabs by referring to them, with certain consistency, as barbarians and Saracens respectively:¹¹⁰ “two barbarians with a Christian Saracen”.¹¹¹ It seems that the conversion of the Arabs called for a change in the appellations, and, with all probability, this need for differentiation might have first been felt in the field of the everyday life of the new proselytes’ communities. Needless to say though, that the term ‘barbarian’ abounds in Cyril’s work, especially in relation to the Saracen raids mentioned there, but it seems that it carries mostly the stereotyped overtones of uncivilized, non-Roman immoral persons. In four cases, presented in *St. Sabas Vita*, the Arabs are depicted with a mixture of rapaciousness, aggressiveness, compassion and gratitude, the latter also being a subject of St. Sabas’ admiration and contemplation.¹¹²

Given the nature of such texts, it is difficult to extract secure information about attitudes and behaviours. Hagiographers are primarily concerned with the presentation of saints’ lives and the exaltation of their faith, courage, and miraculous powers and to provide believers with religious models for

¹⁰⁸ *Narrationes*, III.

¹⁰⁹ For which see Shahid, *Irfan Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, Washington D.C. 1989, 180-213.

¹¹⁰ See also Christides, “Arabs as ‘Barbaroi’ before the Rise of Islam,” 320; Shahid, *I. Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 203, n. 103, 204, n. 112.

¹¹¹ “*dyo ton barbaron meta tinos Chrisianu Sarakenou*,” Cyrillus Scythopolitanus, *Vita Euthymii*, ed. by Schwartz, E., Leipzig 1939, 75.

¹¹² Cyrillus Scythopolitanus, *Vita Sabae*, ed. by Schwartz, E., Leipzig 1939, 96, 97, 99, 187.

imitation, following certain stereotypes of the genre.¹¹³ Thus, it has to be kept in mind that hagiographical narratives (as indeed are historiographical ones) are infiltrated by the certain purposes, which the genre entails.¹¹⁴

1. 3. Concepts, prejudices and stereotypes: Analysis of the Sources

Before proceeding into a deeper analysis of the issues that the sources raise, the cautionary remarks that Jeffreys brought forth on the subject should be discussed. Jeffreys points out that, since the Arabs, in the pre-Islamic period, were just one of a number of ‘outsiders’ with whom the Byzantines came into contact, and since they were on a remote border where they could potentially play the role of a buffer between Byzantium and neighbouring states, they “appear only intermittently in the sources.”¹¹⁵ Because of this “the Arabs are not in the forefront of any writer’s considerations and no one devotes a special study to them ... only a comparatively small number of passages in the historians refer to the Arabs and these have to be put into context, supplemented and interpreted in the light of material available elsewhere.” Hence, she concludes that: “there is a danger of over-interpretation or overloading a simple aside with a vast but fragile hermeneutical construct.” It is true that the barbarians *par excellence* of the fourth and fifth centuries were the Germanic tribes, and the Huns and Alans accompanying them.¹¹⁶ Additionally, it should be stressed, for the period under consideration, that the empire was surrounded by several ‘barbaric’ tribes (Goths, Huns or Alans), which made their presence felt as a real threat for the very existence of the empire. The constant raids of the Slavs and Turkic peoples across the Danube, as well as the threat they posed even to the capital itself, definitely had a much greater impact on the considerations of

¹¹³ See Hackel, Sergei (ed.) *The Byzantine Saint, University of Birmingham Fourteenth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, London 1981, esp. 117-168.

¹¹⁴ For the use of hagiography as historical sources, see Halkin, François “L’hagiographie byzantine au service de l’histoire,” Hussey, J. M. & Obolensky, D. & Runciman, S. (eds.) *Proceedings of the XIIIth International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Oxford 5-10 September 1966*, London 1967, 345-354; see also Haldon’s remarks on hagiography, Haldon, *Byzantium*, 427.

¹¹⁵ Jeffreys, “The Image of the Arabs,” 312.

¹¹⁶ See Jones, W. R. “The Image of the Barbarian,” 381.

both imperial authority and the population of the empire than the presence of the ‘barbarian’ Saracens. Furthermore, the continuing flow of migrating Slav communities to the Balkans, and to what is now modern Greece, and the wars with Persia, were going to affect the empire’s fates more than a Saracen raid on a small community. This might also explain why Ammianus wrote about the Huns and Alans using almost similar expressions to those he used when writing about the Saracens. In such a context, there should be caution about any overestimating judgement regarding the barbarism of the Saracens. Thus, taking into consideration Jeffreys’ reservations, this introductory study attempts a glimpse into pro-existing ideas that might shed more light on the topic of the thesis.

On the other hand, according to the sources, the Saracens were found almost everywhere in the eastern provinces. From the time of Strabo,¹¹⁷ they ranged from Mesopotamia to as far as Coele Syria (practically Southern Palestine), and they are found both within and beyond the *limes*. “The habitat of the Saracens was not exclusively beyond the pale. In the eastern provinces, including Egypt, the Saracens were found everywhere; they were an integral part of the population that dwelt on the fringes of the *oikoumene*. In fact, for many, their homeland was the very region occupied by Rome. They undoubtedly could also be found ... in the major centres of the population.”¹¹⁸

From the presentation of the sources, from the fourth to the late sixth century, it is inferred that the majority of the Byzantine writers deal mostly with the *Scenitae* (tent-dwellers), nomads and federate Saracens (especially in the sixth century, when their role was of primary importance due to the wars with Persia). Practically, these two groups are reflected through the (distorting) mirror of Byzantine literature, both secular and ecclesiastical.¹¹⁹

As previously stated, the Byzantine Empire was heir to the Graeco-Roman world and as such inherited a certain set of ideas, stereotypes and biases. A major event for the evolution of these preconceptions might have been the extension of *civitas* to the provincial population of the Roman Empire, by the

¹¹⁷ Strabo, *Geogr.*, XVI.3.1; see also Christides, “Arabs as ‘Barbaroi’ before the Rise of Islam,” 321.

¹¹⁸ Mayerson, Philip “The Saracens and the Limes,” *BASOR* 262 (1986), 36.

¹¹⁹ Cf. also Shahid, Irfan *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century*, Washington D.C. 1984, 561.

Constitutio Antoniana (212 A.D.), and the adoption of Christianity by both the Roman state and some of the Arabs. In the work of Ammianus the old prejudices seem to continue their existence, however, it has to be remembered that Ammianus was a pagan historian of the late Roman Empire, the decline of which he deplored in his narrative; therefore, he arranged his material accordingly. The continuation of these prejudices is eloquently depicted in the image of the pre-Islamic Arabs as barbarians. In particular, the concept of the city-dweller, with their urban institutions, agrarian way of life, laws, and moral code is strongly contrasted to the figure of the wandering, lawless nomads who live by hunting and raiding. It is telling, in this context, that sedentary ‘outsider’ populations, like the Nabateans or the inhabitants of Palmyra appear in completely different colouring. Conversely, the participation of the Saracens in the units of the Roman army, or as federates, passes unnoticed, as well as that of other nations. The mention of *Equites Saraceni Thamudeni* under the Count of Egypt or the *Equites Saraceni indigenae*, and *Equites Saraceni*, under the Dux of Phoenecia, in *Notitia Dignitatum* though, reveal that the role of the Saracens was much greater than both Ammianus and Zosimus would like us to think. As Jeffreys noted this lack of reference might be based on the prejudice against all barbarian federate people that came to dominate the Roman army, once made up of native Romans.¹²⁰ To this direction also points the lack of mention of the federate Saracens of Mavia in the Gothic war of 378 and their help during the siege of the capital.

In this context, one of the widespread concepts about the world of Rome and Late Antiquity should be questioned, namely the cliché that prejudice towards the ‘outsiders’ was not conceived in racial terms but in terms of cultural inferiority.¹²¹ As Bowersock¹²² rightly pointed out, and Fowden¹²³ remarked, race, in ancient terms, is what distinguishes one *ethnos* (“ethnic group”) from another. From such a point of view it becomes apparent that

¹²⁰ See Jeffreys, “The Image of the Arabs,” 307-308.

¹²¹ See Sherwin-White, A. N. *Racial Prejudice in Imperial Rome*, London 1967.

¹²² Bowersock, G. W. *Roman Arabia*, Cambridge Mass. 1994, 123-124.

¹²³ Fowden, Garth *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, Princeton 1993, 69, n. 35.

from the time of Cicero¹²⁴ a firm prejudice is well established against the Arabs, based on their ethnicity. Ammianus' and Zosimus' testimony testify to this prejudice; the already mentioned phrases "*natio perniciosa*" and "*ethnous heirstou*" sound as stereotypical clichés based upon the prejudice and bias for a certain race. From the testimony of Theophylact ("*apistotaton gar kai alloprosallon to Sarakenikon fylon*") it is also clear that such prejudices were well established and have now become stereotyped expressions in common use.

Besides the secular testimonies though, the views expressed by the ecclesiastical historian Eusebius mark an evolution in the image of the Arabs. Eusebius, by equating the Biblical Ishmaelites or Hagarenes with his contemporary Saracens, adds another constituent to the pejorative connotations of the onomasticon of these people. Shahid suggested that what drew the attention of the ecclesiastical writers to the Saracens was the fact that the latter dwelt around the *loca sancta* and the Holy Land, places of great importance for the Christians; their conversion to Christianity might have also played a role. Be this as it may, Eusebius introduces a religious criterion for the evaluation of the origin of these people, rendering them characteristics that from now on, with the spread of Christianity and its position in the political ideology, might sound negative. The Saracens are not only uncivilised nomads but also descendants of a slave and although linked to Abraham, due to their origin, they are out of God's promises to him. The negative colouring of this view worsens when the accusation of heresy is also added. Eusebius might have had little personal experience of the Saracens, and his attitude might have been imposed by, as Jeffreys suggested, the conventional picture of the Saracens found in the traditional genre he was still working on, while he was introducing a new historical writing.¹²⁵ Furthermore, apart from the Graeco-Roman historians (e.g. Ammianus), the Biblical authors (whose works he studied and commented on) should have also played a great role in the formation of his views towards Arabs.¹²⁶ Eusebius, apart from being an apologist for Constantine, also united the Church and the empire in a single

¹²⁴ Cicero, *De prov. Cons.*, 5.10: "*Iudaeis et Syris, nationibus natis servituti.*"

¹²⁵ Jeffreys, "The Image of the Arabs in Byzantine Literature," 310.

¹²⁶ See also Shahid, *Rome and the Arabs*, 108.

historical narrative,¹²⁷ thus laying the foundation not only of a new genre (Church history) but, most importantly, the ideological frame of the east Roman Empire. Soon this union of Christianity and *Romanitas* would lead to the formation of a new political orthodoxy, and politics would always be ‘religious’, and religion would always be ‘political’ for the Byzantine thought-world.¹²⁸ For these reasons, Eusebius exercised a great influence upon the next generations of ecclesiastical historians, although Shahid’s judgement on Eusebius’ influence upon them,¹²⁹ concerning the image of Arabs, does not find support in the texts of the fifth-century historians.

On the contrary, as has been previously shown, the image of the Arabs, as projected in the works of the fifth-century ecclesiastical historians, is improved and reveals other considerations and information than in the previous period. This change of attitudes might be connected with two factors. First, both Sozomen and Theodoret had close contact with the people they were writing about, and, on several occasions the information they transmit comes from personal observation. Phrases such as “as I have learned from the Arabs”,¹³⁰ and Theodoret’s description of the Arabs visiting St. Symeon the Stylite, indicate their intimate and direct knowledge of certain information they transmit. It should be remembered that Sozomen was a native of Bethelia, near Gaza, and Theodoret a native of Antioch and bishop of Cyrrhus, a city close to St. Symeon’s pillar and pilgrimage site. Secondly, the process of Christianisation of the Arabs occurred during their period, as is also attested to in their works, which either transfer information about the missionary efforts for the Christianisation of the eastern populations (Sozomen) or propagate the life of ascetics as models for religious life (Theodoret’s *Religious History*). The missionary efforts of the spreading of Christianity, and the fact that many Arabs had converted to Christianity might have contributed to the views that these authors expressed about them. A further attestation to this change is also the fact that, in both Ecumenical Councils of this century (431, 451 A.D., in Ephesus and Chalcedon

¹²⁷ Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 90.

¹²⁸ Haldon, *Byzantium*, 25.

¹²⁹ Shahid, Irfan *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century*, 562.

¹³⁰ Sozomenus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, VII. 19.2.

respectively), the Arab participant bishops expressed and supported orthodox views.

The changes that took place during the fifth century, through the catalytic presence of Christianity, and the process of the development of the pre-Islamic Arabs' image from the fourth to sixth century is expressively described in the religious vocabulary of Cyril of Scythopolis. One of his references presents them as "the old wolves of Arabia (the barbarians) becoming members of the spiritual flock of Christ".¹³¹ In another place he states that the people, who were previously Hagarenes and Ishmaelites, i.e., children of a slave woman and out of God's promises to Abraham, became descendants of Sarah and inheritors of [God's] promise, transferred by baptism from slavery to liberty.¹³² The importance of the religious factor for the reception of the Arabs also appears in the historical narratives of the secular historians of the sixth century. There, the Christian federates and allies of the Byzantines, the Ghassānids, are never referred to as barbarians.¹³³ Nevertheless, such an attitude should not lead us to suppose that the religious factor is the only important one for the construction of the new image. The situation between the Arab federates and the empire reflects, up to a certain point, the political events of that period. Although the Ghassānids, in the sixth century, converted to the Monophysite creed (and actually enforced and propagated it),¹³⁴ they were not touched by Justinian, who "throughout his reign, attempted to bring conformity of belief and creed to the empire."¹³⁵ Justinian used the Ghassānids in his wars with Persia and, through them, tried to implement his policy concerning the borders and the other Arab tribes. Since their alliance then with the empire, and against their heretic creed, the Ghassānids were not called barbarians. On the contrary, as is obvious in Evagrius for instance, the Lakhmids, although Christians of the Nestorian

¹³¹ Cyrillus Scythopolitanus, *Vita Euthymii*, 24.21.

¹³² "apelysen ouketi Agarenous kai Ismaelitas, alla tes Saras apogonous kai tes epaggelias kleronomous gegonotas dia tou baptismatos apo douleias eis eleutherian metenehthentas," Cyrillus Scythopolitanus, *Vita Euthymii*, 21.8-10.

¹³³ The Roman borders and their defence have attracted the interest of many scholars. For relative bibliography see Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, 191, n. 27.

¹³⁴ The authoritative work on Monophysitism is Frend, H. C. William *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, London 1972. For the religious policies of the Ghassānids, see Shahid, Irfan *Byzantium and Arabs in the Sixth Century*.

¹³⁵ Haldon, *Byzantium*, 24.

creed, are called barbarians because they are the allies of the enemy of the state, i.e. the Persians.¹³⁶ As can be inferred, religion is just one constituent of the conception of civilisation, while another one is political alliance, and Christianity is not enough to assure the participation of an ‘outsider’ into Roman culture. On the other hand, religious tensions might distort events or behaviours. Such is the case of Evagrius, who implicitly accuses al-Mundhir of treachery without mentioning his victory over the Persian Arabs.¹³⁷ In this way, Evagrius’ attitude reveals that the distinction between Chalcedonian orthodoxy (his conviction) and Monophysitism (al-Mundhir’s creed) is of great importance.

Concerning the major factors that led to the formation of the above-mentioned views, the following remarks should be emphasised. The antithesis of sedentary people to nomads, closely connected with the Graeco-Roman concept of barbarism still seems to be of paramount importance for the interpretation of the ‘otherness.’ Of course, with the intermediary contribution of political or religious ideological concerns, it could either be stressed openly or not according to the writer. The proximity of the writer to the places where Arabs lived and their direct knowledge of their culture and lifestyle, as the cases of Sozomen and Theodoret show, might be a major factor for a more sympathetic image of these people. On the other hand, the ideological programme and the aims of each writer (as in the cases of Ammianus, Zosimus, and with all probability Eusebius), might account for the distorting image projecting from such works.

Having gone through the main historical sources on Byzantine attitudes, as concluding remarks, the key points of interest for this thesis should be noted. As Eph’al proved “there is no historical basis to the tradition of associating the Ishmaelites with the Arabs,” but the idea of such an association developed later and became established in post-Biblical tradition and among non-Jewish circles before the fourth century B.C.¹³⁸ The identification of Arabs with Ishmaelites seems to have happened in the Middle East at the beginning of the Christian era. The Arabs’ adoption of this genealogy seems to have happened

¹³⁶ See also Christides, “Arabs as ‘Barbaroi’ before the Rise of Islam,” 324.

¹³⁷ See Jeffreys, “The Image of the Arabs in Byzantine Literature,” 311.

¹³⁸ Eph’al, I. “Ishmael” and “Arabs”: A Transformation of Ethnological Terms,” *JNES* 35 (1976), 231; Millar, “Hagar, Ishmael, Josephus and the Origins of Islam,” 23-45.

with the spread of Christianity in the area around the fourth century, as Sozomen's testimony implies.¹³⁹

In the Byzantine sources the terms Ishmaelites, Hagarenes, Arabs, and Saracens are used interchangeably to describe the nomad desert-dwellers on the fringes of the Roman Empire. It appears that the names Ishmaelites and Hagarenes carry primarily religious (though pejorative) connotations, whereas the words Arabs and Saracens are mainly used as national appellations for these people. The designation of the latter as Ishmaelites or Hagarenes attests to their alleged descent from Abraham, through Ishmael and his slave mother Hagar. Meanwhile, we should not fail to notice that this genealogical connection of the Arabs with Abraham also associates them with Abrahamic religious legitimacy and Jewish customs, as Sozomen's testimony shows. This view, regardless of being true or perceived as such,¹⁴⁰ might in part explain the later Byzantine accusations of Jewish collaboration with the invading Arabs, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Regarding the use of these names in Byzantine sources, it should be added that as far as I am aware, the terms Saracens (and secondarily Arabs) were used almost exclusively from the fifth up to ninth century dozens of times, while the terms Ishmaelites and Hagarenes were used in a handful of references in each century.

In addition, the stereotype of the Arabs as barbarians and lawless, uncivilised nomads, who lived outside the limits of the civilized *oikoumene*, even if it was softened by their admission to Christianity, was destined to remain the basic Byzantine preconception of Arabs for the years to come. The duration and persistency of these concepts and stereotypes is validated due to their ample use by the authors of the seventh century in their descriptions of the Arab conquerors, as will be seen in the Chapter 2. Before turning our attention to the initial Byzantine reactions to the emergence of Islam, it is helpful to mention here that the following references, in contrast to the majority of the reports analysed until now and which derive from

¹³⁹ Cf. Hawting, Gerald "The religion of Abraham and Islam" in Goodman, Martin & others (eds) *Abraham, the Nations and the Hagarites*, Leiden & Boston 2010, 490.

¹⁴⁰ Reports like that of Sozomen have been questioned, if they "reflect their authors' knowledge that the Arabs observed practices and taboos that non-Arab observers regarded as characteristic of the Jews," or if they transfer real knowledge that the Arabs themselves claimed an Abrahamic legitimacy (Hawting, "The religion of Abraham and Islam," 491).

Constantinople, come from the region of the Middle East.¹⁴¹ It was the Christians of the Eastern Byzantine provinces who, with their knowledge and interpretation of events and concepts, contributed to the formation of Byzantine attitudes towards Islam and Muslims.

Chapter 2

2. The emergence of Islam and the first Byzantine reactions

2. 1. Introduction

Although for several scholars —Byzantinists and Islamicists alike— it might seem quite reasonable that every discussion about Byzantine views about Muslims and Islam should start from the mid-seventh century¹⁴² (the period of the Arab conquests and the emergence of Islam), it is due to the highly problematic character of this period that several other scholars (of Islamic history especially) are restrained by the historical sources and the interpretations referring to this issue. These restraints have to do with the emergence and the nature of Islam during that period, as well as with the denomination of “Muslim” for the invading Arabs or, for that reason, for the religious character of their conquests as well. Of course, behind this academic difference of opinion lies the controversial issue of the emergence and formation of Islam; whereas the former tend to see an already formed Islam by the death of the Prophet and its expansion with the Arab (or Islamic for this reason) conquests, the latter talk about the gradual development and formation of the new religion, especially through the interactions between the conquerors and the conquered.

¹⁴¹ For the importance of the Eastern Byzantine Provinces, see Cameron, Averil “The Eastern Provinces in the Seventh Century A.D. Hellenism and the Emergence of Islam” in Said, Suzanne (ed.) *ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΣ: Quelques Jalons pour une Histoire de l' Identité Grecque*, Leiden 1991, 287-313.

¹⁴² As it is implied in most narrative historical works.

Inevitably, the cautious exploration of the initial Byzantine conceptions should attempt to clearly distinguish what they say or not and why, about the invading Arabs and their religious tenets. Moreover, it should be accompanied by an investigation to clarify to what degree the Byzantine attitudes expressed, reveal a positive knowledge and reference to Muslims and Islam or whether they follow already established forms and patterns of (mis)understandings and (pre)conceptions. At the same time, depending on the importance of the case, issues like the character, credibility and reliability of the given sources for the information they transfer and their validity for a possible and/or parallel use for a reconstruction of the early history of Islam,¹⁴³ should be examined and answered according to the state of the contemporary research in the field. While taking the Arab conquests as a *terminus a quo* for the Byzantine conceptions towards Muslims, the discussion will be extended to include the late seventh and early eighth century. This is due to the importance of that period for both the formation of a distinct expression of Islam and the new Arab polity-state and the Byzantine apprehension of these facts as such. This *terminus post quo* is chosen mainly for two reasons. Firstly because, by that period, a clear(er) expression of a distinct doctrinal stance and polity had been pronounced by the now firmly established Umayyad Caliphate, especially during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik (685-705) and his son al-Walīd (705-715), with the exclusive use of the Arabic language by the administration, the minting of aniconic coins, and the inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock condemning the Christian Trinitarian beliefs.¹⁴⁴ In other words, the Arabisation and Islamisation of the conquered populations,¹⁴⁵ as well as the cultural appropriation of the conquered territories,¹⁴⁶ were enhanced and further established. The rationale behind this

¹⁴³ A question to which Wansbrough (*The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, London 1978, 116-117, 119), Crone & Cook (*Hagarism, the Making of the Islamic World*, Cambridge 1977, 3-34) and Hoyland (*Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Princeton 1997, 598) have already given different and opposing answers, for the whole body of non-Muslim sources.

¹⁴⁴ See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, Excursus F, 687-703, esp. 696-701.

¹⁴⁵ For the clarification of these terms, see Hawting, Gerard R. *The first Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661–750*, London 2000, 1-11.

¹⁴⁶ The building of the Dome of the Rock and the Great Mosque of Damascus are the most celebrated expressions of the new Islamic art and architecture in the religious sphere, while the Umayyad qusur, following Ghassānid practices, perform as examples of the symbolic

evolution (was it a gradual change or an assertive expression of pre-existent characteristics of the conquerors' religious and cultural ideas?) still remains a desideratum and a highly disputable issue for early Islamic history.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, it definitely marks a turning point for the Muslim rule in the conquered regions and produces some of the necessary historical material for its exploration, although ambiguously in certain cases. Secondly, the available Byzantine sources, from that period on, reflect a clear and unambiguous understanding of the character and the beliefs of the new settlers in the ex-Byzantine lands of the Near East. Not coincidentally, the Ps. Methodius' *Apocalypse*, which dates from the same period, attests to this drastic cultural change (also expressing fears about Christian conversions to Islam, under these policies);¹⁴⁸ a change which, of course, was solidified with the *translatio imperii* to Baghdad under the Abbasids.

The texts under study are exclusively religious in character and they are either anonymous (the *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*, the *Sixty Martyrs of Gaza*, and the *Miracles of St. George*) or they belong to the most important theological and ecclesiastic figures of the period (Maximus, Sophronius, and Anastasius of Sinai). All the relative references are dispersed throughout the works mentioned above. The importance of these texts lies in two aspects: firstly, they are the earliest Byzantine texts mentioning the Arab invasions and Muslim beliefs, and secondly, they present the first Byzantine views on Muslims, as expressed by the pen of pre-eminent theologians or ecclesiastics, whose work exercised a great influence on Byzantine theology and culture. Due to their importance, for both Islamic and Byzantine history, academic study/research has also raised certain questions in both disciplines. As mentioned above, our task in this case is twofold: while discussing the initial Byzantine reactions and views on Muslims, certain issues concerning the emergence and the nature of Islam will have to be answered. In particular, the

appropriation in the profane sphere; see Grabar, Oleg *The Formation of Islamic Art*, New Haven & London 1987, esp.43-71 for the symbolic appropriation of the land.

¹⁴⁷ See the relevant discussion: Donner, McGraw Fred "The Formation of the Islamic State," *JAOS* 106 (1986), 283-296; Johns, Jeremy "Archaeology and the history of early Islam," *JESHO* 46 (2003), 411-436; Foss, Clive "A Syrian coinage of Mu'āwīya," *Revue Numismatique* 158 (2002), 353-365; and Hoyland, Robert "New Documentary Texts and the Early Islamic State," *BSOAS* 69 (2006), 395-416.

¹⁴⁸ For which see the next chapter.

following questions are raised by this task: What views on invading Arabs/Muslims do these initial references express? What attitudes do they suggest and what exegetical schemes do they offer for understanding the Muslim presence and victorious invasion? Do they reveal any significant and real knowledge about the emergence of Islam? Do Byzantine references describe similar attitudes to Muslims as those of their heretic co-religionists? And, finally, did they fail to realise the significance of the new politico-religious reality that the emergence of Islam marked, and if so, why? (In other words, what was the impact of the then historical context for the initial Byzantine understanding of Muslims?)

Apart from its significance regarding the questions on the emergence of Islam, the period from the late sixth to the early eighth century also marks an era of dramatic changes for the late Roman world, in the fields of politics, society, economy, culture and ideology.¹⁴⁹ Most of the Byzantinists have pointed out its transitional character, especially when referring to the seventh century, which gradually transformed the late-antique Roman society and culture to a more distinct medieval-Byzantine one.¹⁵⁰ Before discussing the initial Byzantine reactions towards Muslims, an overview of certain aspects of the Byzantine culture, a general outline of the political events, and a preliminary exploration of the main characteristics of this transformation seem essential for an intelligible comprehension of the frame into which the expression(s) of these reactions and reports were taking place, if not actually being dictated by it.¹⁵¹ Subsequently, the presentation and the detailed analysis of the sources will be followed by a discussion, concerning the scope of this thesis.

2. 2. The Byzantine ‘symbolic universe’

¹⁴⁹ See Haldon, *Byzantium*, 39.

¹⁵⁰ See esp. Haldon, *Byzantium*; and Kaegi, Walter E. *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, Cambridge 1997 (repr.).

¹⁵¹ Cf. Cameron, “New Themes,” 104.

The Eusebian vision of the history of a “united universal Church and universal Empire,”¹⁵² under the leadership of a Christian emperor —the God’s chosen representative on earth— formed the basis of the ‘official’ ideology of both the state and the Church. The subjects of the empire were the Chosen people, the new Israelites, and they were convinced that their state “was a *theosterikton kratos* [God-protected state]... rooted, and grounded in God and protected by Christ and by His Virgin Mother,”¹⁵³ and that it should embrace the whole Christian *oikoumene*.¹⁵⁴ Hence, the duty of the emperor, as the God’s chosen guide for his Chosen people, was to defend, protect and promote orthodoxy (the right belief) and to extend the territories of the empire until the entire *oikoumene* was unified in God’s realm on earth (Constantinople came to be expressly identified with Jerusalem),¹⁵⁵ in its eschatological process towards celestial Jerusalem. Two crucial ideas are implied in this hermeneutical scheme: firstly that the mission for the propagation of orthodoxy is a God-imposed duty not only upon the Church (following Christ’s command to his disciples, *Mat. 28.19*) but upon the empire as well;¹⁵⁶ and secondly, the victories of the unbelievers, barbarians or enemies were not due to their “own virtue, but because of the sins of the Christian Romans. As long as the Byzantines maintained the true faith and followed the commandments, they were bound to win on all fronts.”¹⁵⁷ As it is obvious, and has been rightly stressed, the creation of this ‘symbolic universe’ (apart from Hellenistic kingship and universalistic conceptions) is heavily indebted to —if not actually transplanted from— the Old Testament’s texts and ideas.¹⁵⁸ Thus, the gradual Christianisation of the empire “introduced into Byzantine ideology the entire repertory of Old Testament typology and

¹⁵² Fowden, Garth *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, Princeton 1993, 90.

¹⁵³ Baynes, N. H. “The Thought-World of East Rome,” *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays*, London 1955, 32.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Mango, Cyril “Byzantinism and Romantic Hellenism,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 (1965), 30; and Ahrweiler, Hélène *L’idéologie politique de l’empire byzantin*, Paris 1975.

¹⁵⁵ Alexander, Paul J. “The Strength of the Empire and Capital as Seen through Byzantine Eyes,” *Speculum* 37 (1962), 346 ff. See also n. 482, below.

¹⁵⁶ Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 90-93.

¹⁵⁷ Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 93.

¹⁵⁸ Baynes, “The Thought-World of East Rome,” 33.

prophecy,”¹⁵⁹ which consequently intermingled with the Greek and Roman legacy, and made the subjects of the empire feel both Romans and heirs of God’s promises and covenant, i.e. Christians-New Israelites.

Although this ideological framework in general terms defined the ‘symbolic universe’ of the Roman/Byzantine people, it has very rarely been pursued in its ideal form. The emperor Justinian I was the first to put into practice the key elements of this ideology in the sphere of politics, legislation and religious policies, committing himself, in an insistent and fastidious way, to personally dealing with all these issues;¹⁶⁰ but even his elaborate efforts to translate ideology into pragmatic terms were not met without opposition. It is suggestive of his perceptions, however, that he was the first emperor to represent himself on coins holding the *globus cruciger*¹⁶¹ (symbol of the heavenly basis of imperial rule),¹⁶² and to define the state as ‘universal.’¹⁶³

In addition to this, two other issues of great importance need to be clarified: on the one hand the relationships between the state and the Church, and on the other the relationship between politics and religion. The implied or declared harmonious coexistence between the Church and the state, by the imperial ideology, reflects the utopian desire for such an irenic coexistence rather than reality.¹⁶⁴ Although, according to political ideology, the parallel institutions of priesthood and the secular ruler were inextricably bound together in their God-given mission and concern for the Christian citizens of the empire and the protection of the faith, there were several incidents when conflicts and disputes arose regarding the limits and the extent of each authority. What was especially under question on the part of the Church, was the right of the emperor to intervene in theological or ecclesiastical affairs veiled under his authoritative role as God-approved protector of the faith. But what was actually at stake was the degree, the core and the possible repercussions of the anticipated intervention. Such interventions were

¹⁵⁹ Alexander, “The Strength of the Empire and Capital as Seen through Byzantine Eyes,” *Speculum* 37 (1962), 346 ff.

¹⁶⁰ See Procopius, *Historia arcana* XII, 27; XIII, 28 ff.

¹⁶¹ See Ahrweiler, Hélène *L'idéologie politique de l'empire byzantin*.

¹⁶² Grierson, Philip *Byzantine Coinage*, Washington D.C. 1999, 28.

¹⁶³ By Agapetos the Deacon; see Agapetos, *Expositio capitum admonitoriorum*, PG 86, 1165A, which is also an eloquent exhibition of the above-mentioned imperial ideology.

¹⁶⁴ About this issue see the discussion in Haldon, *Byzantium*, 281-286.

obviously decided and accepted or not in interdependence with the circumstances and the views and the personality of both the emperor intervened and of the ecclesiastic authorities of each time. That is to say that their relationships were dynamic and not static, and sometimes the Church could tolerate and eventually accept the intervention of the emperor (although very rarely), depending on the questions at issue.¹⁶⁵ In the seventh century though, when the emperor claimed for himself the right to intervene in matters of theology and dogma due to his dual status, as emperor and priest, it was Maximus Confessor who staunchly refuted the theoretical grounds of this imperial claim and proclaimed the exclusive authority of the Church upon taking decisions on such matters. His exemplary stance, although costing him dearly, was to be invoked and recalled very often by ecclesiastics in the future.

In close connection with the afore-mentioned issue is the relationship between politics and religion; a field into which misapprehensions might arise due to modern conceptions of both the meaning and the function of these terms. The division and the strict demarcation of the areas into which the profane and sacred should act and function, is a recent phenomenon ensuing from modern west-European thought and culture which, although having its roots in the Reformation period, was conceptualised and interpreted as a division between politics or secular and religious or spiritual affairs during the period of the Enlightenment;¹⁶⁶ in addition to this, it was pursued as a main principle and tool for the implementation of the new concepts of state, power and governance. Subsequently, this division was substantiated and implemented, quite recently, in modern western societies with the expulsion of religion from the public domain and its confinement to the sphere of private life (what would be called secularism); it goes without saying that in this process meanings, definitions and limitations as well as functions of religion and politics, have been completely transformed from what they used to be in pre-modern societies. As a result, it should not be underestimated the

¹⁶⁵ For an exploration of the tensions between these two poles of byzantine power as well as for the history of their relation see Dagron, Gilbert *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, trans. by Jean Birrell, New York 2007.

¹⁶⁶ Lenoir recently suggested that most of Enlightenment's claims derive from Jesus' teachings, as found in the Evangiles, see Lenoir, Frédéric *Le Christe philosophe*, Paris 2007.

rather obvious fact that dealing with the Byzantine history and society, such —or similar— modern conceptions and connotations are of no value and can lead to misapprehensions and distortions. On the contrary, during this period, the ‘thought-world’ (or the ‘symbolic universe’)¹⁶⁷ through which —and into which— people could see and understand themselves and the *cosmos*, both spiritually and secularly, was ‘religious’. Moreover, it was implied, interpreted and translated into religious terms, which the Christian vocabulary had already created. As Haldon expressively remarks: “Politics are thus always ‘religious,’ and religion is always ‘political,’ however implicit this may be.”¹⁶⁸ Inevitably, any interpretation of Byzantine history, culture and mentality should seriously consider these issues and their expressions in their conjunction and fusion and not treat them as separate and phenomena.

2. 3. Historical frame

The ascension to the throne in 602 of the usurper Phocas, after had dethroned Maurice, offered the Persians the pretext to invade, and successfully occupy, the eastern territories of the Roman Empire.¹⁶⁹ By 610, the year Herakleios assumed the throne under a senatorial coup, Khosroes II had conquered most of Mesopotamia, and five years later he gained control of Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine and Egypt, threatening even the capital itself. In the Balkans and the region of modern Greece the invading Slavs continued their *en masse* descent and settlement. The military discontent, which gave birth to unrest, has been also interpreted as another indication of the social changes affecting the Roman Empire.¹⁷⁰ In the meantime, the appearance of a new military aristocracy had been facilitated by the transformations applied during that period (military decentralisation of the state and subordination of civil to military authority).¹⁷¹ On the other hand, the active role and

¹⁶⁷ The first term was introduced by Baynes, “The Thought-World of East Rome,” while the latter from Haldon, *Byzantium*, passim.

¹⁶⁸ Haldon, *Byzantium*, 25.

¹⁶⁹ For a historical narrative of the period 610-717 A.D. see Ostrogorsky, George *History of the Byzantine state*, trans. by Joan Hussey, Oxford 1968, 87-146; and Haldon, *Byzantium*, 41-91.

¹⁷⁰ See Haldon, John Frederick “Ideology and Social Change in the Seventh Century: Military Discontent as a Barometer,” *Klio* 68 (1986), 139-190.

¹⁷¹ Haldon, John Frederick “Some Considerations on the Byzantine Society,” 112.

participation of the demes of Greens and Blues in the political changes contributed greatly to social upheaval and uncertainty throughout the seventh century.¹⁷²

The antagonism and rivalry of the two great empires of that time, and their ensuing exhaustion and weakness, has been quite rightly emphasised as a pivotal and catalytic factor for the advance and success of the Arab invasions by scholars both of Byzantine and Islamic history. For the scope of this study it is necessary to underline that, the invasions and the devastation caused by the Persians to the Near East, definitely left their mark on the populations and the land, although it would be exaggerating to claim that they led to the downfall of Antiquity.¹⁷³ They have however, caused some other effects, the consequences of which might have significantly contributed both to the political developments, as well as to the mentality, of the conquered populations (and to the predominantly Christian inhabitants of Palestine and Syria in particular) in the years to come. The collapse of the Byzantine administration and the loss of revenue from the eastern lands, over a period of ten years, resulted in the reduction of the ability of the state to meet its needs for defence (through manpower resources) and revenue collection.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, the conflicting allegiances of the population, being either those of Christians of several denominations (Chalcedonians, Monophysites or Nestorians) or Jews, were strengthened, while the erstwhile privileged Chalcedonians had to find ways of coexistence with the other convictions on equal terms, under the Persian control. Although by the early 630s, the empire had managed to regain control of its eastern territories and Herakleios had managed to defeat the Persians, as well as bring back the True Cross to Jerusalem in a triumphal ceremony, the administration could not recover as quickly. Herakleios was also not able to avert the fate of the region, which fell into the hands of the invading Arabs. This situation of continuous invasions, which caused great devastation, occupation and conflicting allegiances, which

¹⁷² See for example the relevant references in *Doctrina* and in the works of Anastasius Sinaite below.

¹⁷³ As Clive Foss claims in "The Persians in Asia Minor and the End of Antiquity," *EHR* 90 (1975), 721-774; see also the objections expressed by Brandes, W. "Ephesos in Byzantinischer Zeit," *Klio* 64 (1982), 611-622.

¹⁷⁴ See Hendy, M. F. *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300-1450*, Cambridge 1985, 625-626; Haldon, *Byzantium*, 10-11.

lasted for almost twenty years, could not help but have certain effects upon the thought and mentality of the Christian populations of the mid-seventh century. In addition to this, the agony suffered by the people and the urgent need for answers, in order to explain persuasively their position in the then fragmented and torn apart Christian *oikoumene*, might have influenced their expression of attitudes and concepts towards the 'inimical other' as well as causing them to reflect upon themselves.

It seems that long before the Persian-Arab invasions there was a transformation under way of the socio-economic and religio-cultural basis of the late Antique world and the invasions just marked the outcome of these developments.¹⁷⁵ Several aspects of this transformation, which marks the transition from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages, have been discussed, like the nature of the state, land use and settlement patterns, fiscal structures and systems of exchange, elites and local aristocracies, the army, as well as the fate of the classical city and the emergence of the medieval *kastra*. However, as Whickam has clearly shown, single generalisations cannot explain sufficiently the early Middle Ages, which "has always resisted synthesis," and there is need for variable approaches.¹⁷⁶ Whickam noted that the situation varies and significantly differs from region to region concerning all the above-mentioned aspects of life. Cities present heterogeneous signs of economic or demographic weakening from place to place. While cities, for example, in Syria and Palestine continued to thrive as production centres until 749-750, in the Byzantine heartland of Greece, the Aegean, and Anatolia though, which showed close parallels to Syrian developments, from the early seventh century there appear abrupt divergencies.¹⁷⁷ Similar differentiations also appear concerning the urban and rural prosperity, as well as the regional elites from region to region. What seems to hold true though is the fact that the Persian occupation and the Arab invasions caused structural

¹⁷⁵ For this procedure see Kennedy, Hugh "The Last Century of Byzantine Syria: A Reinterpretation," *BF* 10 (1985), 141-183; idem, "Change and Continuity in Syria and Palestine at the Time of the Moslem Conquest," *ARAM* 1 (1989), 258-267, Cameron, *The Mediterranean World*, ch. 7-8; Haldon, *Byzantium*, ch. 3-4; Haldon, John Frederick "Ideology and Social Change," *Klio* 68 (1986), 139-190.

¹⁷⁶ Whickam, Chris *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800*, Oxford 2005, 825.

¹⁷⁷ Whickam, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, 625-634.

reorientations. "Syria and Palestine had been heavily integrated to the Mediterranean during the Roman Empire, but the Caliphate was only secondarily a Mediterranean power."¹⁷⁸

The shrinkage of the Roman Empire during the seventh century, apart from revealing the empire's weakness in the aftermath of the Justinianic reconquest and restoration, was also characterised by transformations and changes in the ideological and cultural sphere. Already since the late sixth century, Latin had been forgotten and abandoned in favour of Greek as the official language of the empire. Indicative of this fashion, was the adoption of the term *Basileus*¹⁷⁹ instead of *Imperator* by Herakleios in 629, as well as the change of court and administration titles into Greek, though certain archaic forms were retained.¹⁸⁰ More importantly, it has been argued that among the major changes taking place during the seventh century, was a re-orientation of state ideology (or of political orthodoxy),¹⁸¹ which resulted in the growing intolerance of the Roman Empire towards diversity and the parallel attempt to create a politico-religious orthodoxy based on homogeneity of faith and religious ideology. This intolerance towards diversity was followed by introversion and exclusivist tendencies by Byzantine society and a demand for consensus and conformity. The forced baptism and conversion of the Jews to Christianity, the efforts to unify the anti-Chalcedonian Monophysites, as well as the canons of the Quinisext Council, have been viewed as eloquent expressions of such attitudes.¹⁸² Nonetheless, the well-established scheme (an amalgamation of the Old Testament, Late Antique and Christian features) of God's chastisement due to people's sinful behaviour, and repentance, resulted in prayers for the intervention of Jesus, his mother the *Theotokos*, and the saints. Such prayers were also followed by fasting, processions and the veneration of saints' relics or icons, in the hope that the sincere expression of

¹⁷⁸ Whickam, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, 28.

¹⁷⁹ Konidaris, J. "Die Novellen des Kaisers Herakleios," *Fontes Minores* V: 84; for the previous titles see *Op.cit.*, 80. For this change and its uses in international relations, see Chrysos, Evangelos "The Title Basileus in Early Byzantine International Relations," *DOP* 32 (1978), 29-75; see also Shahid, Irfan "Heraclius: Πιστὸς ἐν Χριστῷ Βασιλεύς," *DOP* 34-35 (1980-1981), 225-237.

¹⁸⁰ Herrin, *The Formation*, 204-205 & n. 86, 87 with relevant references.

¹⁸¹ Haldon, John "Ideology and Social Change," *Klio* 68 (1986), 139-190.

¹⁸² See Haldon, *Byzantium*, 346-355.

repentance and faith would calm the divine wrath and restore the temporarily disturbed order of things.¹⁸³

The Christological conflicts, and in particular the issue of Monophysitism, from the beginning of the fifth century onwards, had already alienated the eastern populations of the Roman Empire from the imperial centre. These conflicts were rekindled with the appearance of Monoenergetism – Monothelitism, thus making the schism between Chalcedonians (the proponents of the ecclesiastical Orthodoxy) and the anti-Chalcedonians even greater. The attempts on the part of the emperors to reconcile the several opposing groups failed as they met unanimous rejection on both sides. Monothelitism in particular, although provoked by the theologians rather than by political need,¹⁸⁴ managed to involve the emperor Herakleios, who issued the *Ekthesis* in order to stop further discussion. Inside the very same document, Monothelitism was promulgated, at exactly the same time that most parts of Syria and Palestine were put under the control of the invading Arabs. This compromise, however, contrary to the wishes of its editor, caused further division and had both religious and ideological repercussions, as the issue of *Typos* and the trial of Maximus by Constans II testify.¹⁸⁵

Although statistics and figures for that period do not exist, it seems valid to say that Orthodox populations were mainly concentrated in the big cities of the Middle East and were not dispersed to the same extent in the countryside, where the presence and power of the Monophysites was greater. On the other hand, it seems that Palestine was predominantly Orthodox-Byzantine, whereas in Syria and Egypt the majority had adopted the anti-Chalcedonian creeds.¹⁸⁶ Regarding these religious divisions, it has often been assumed in the past that

¹⁸³ The *Synaxaria* of the Church, especially that of Constantinople, contain several like the afore-mentioned reactions and commemorations of disasters and/or divine intercession for the deliverance of the faithful. See Brown, Peter "A Dark-Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy," *EHR* 88 (1973), 1-34; Cameron, Averil "The Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople: A City finds its Symbol," *JTS* 29 (1978), 79-108.

¹⁸⁴ See Haldon, *Byzantium*, 49.

¹⁸⁵ For an analysis of the Monophysite controversies see Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*. For the development and the consequences of Monothelitism and Monoenergism see Herrin, Judith *The Formation*, 183-219 and 250-290. Valuable for the sources referring to the issue of Monothelitism is Winkelmann, Friedhelm "Die Quellen zur Erforschung des monenergetisch-monothelischen Streites," *Klio* 69 (1987), 515-559.

¹⁸⁶ See Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, 294, 320, 335, 337, 355; Berkey, Jonathan P. *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800*, Cambridge 2003, 23; Griffith, Sidney H. *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, Princeton & Oxford 2008, 12.

the theological conflicts, and the Monophysite movement in particular, played a very decisive role in the success of the invasions, and the Monophysites preferred the Arabs to the Byzantines, due to the former's persecution by the Byzantine Empire.¹⁸⁷ Notwithstanding the negative feelings of the anti-Chalcedonian populations towards the imperial centre, most modern scholars have denied the plausibility of that claim.¹⁸⁸ The seventh-century sources point to a more complex situation, which differentiates from place to place and, in any case, most of them are hostile to the Arabs.¹⁸⁹

Concerning the nature, the reasons, the success or the effects of the conquests,¹⁹⁰ several interpretations have been proffered over the years both by the relevant sources of that period and by modern scholars. A number of factors have been suggested as possible reasons for this phenomenon: the fervour of the religion of Islam (either in religious or social terms), the animosity of the local populations, especially of the Monophysites and Jews towards the Byzantines, the initial complete Byzantine indifference to the invasions, military and warfare tactics, hardships of climatic conditions etc.¹⁹¹ In fact, however, in hindsight of the developments that followed, it is relatively easy to misapprehend and not realise the complexity of the issues involved here. As a result, several modern scholars warn about these difficulties¹⁹² and suggest (apart from political and military events) the examination of multiple factors and parameters, that existed in pre-conquest

¹⁸⁷ See e.g. Stratos, Andreas N. *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, vol. II, 634-641, trans. by Harry T. Hionides, Amsterdam 1972: ch. VI; Brooks, E. W. "The Arabs in Asia Minor (641-750), from Arabic Sources," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 18 (1898), 182-183; Moorhead, John "The Earliest Christian Response to Islam," *Religion* 11 (1981), 265-274 among others.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Cameron, *The Mediterranean World*, 190.

¹⁸⁹ See Hoyland's discussion of the topic, with reference to the sources, *Seeing Islam* 23-26. Cameron notes: "it has often been argued that the religious divisions between Constantinople and the eastern provinces from the mid-6 c. on were a major factor in making the east more receptive to Islam. This is, I think, a rather simplistic view which requires much closer examination," "New Themes," 94. See also Haldon, *Byzantium*, 50.

¹⁹⁰ On the early Arab conquests see Donner, Fred McGraw *The early Islamic Conquests*, Princeton N.J. 1981; Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, Butler, Alfred Joshua *The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the Last Thirty Years of the Roman Dominion*, Oxford 1978; Constantelos, Demetrios J. "The Moslem Conquests of the Near East as Revealed in the Greek Sources of the Seventh and the Eighth Centuries," *Byzantion* 42 (1972), 325-357; Hill, Donald Routledge *The Termination of Hostilities in the Early Arab Conquests, A.D. 634-656*, London 1971; Kennedy, Hugh *The Great Arab Conquests: how the Spread of Islam Changed the World we Live in*, London 2007.

¹⁹¹ See characteristically Stratos, Andreas N. *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, vol. II 634-641, 117-133; and Gabrieli, Francesco *Muhammad and the Conquests of Islam*, trans. by Virginia Luling & Rosamund Linell, London 1968, passim.

¹⁹² Berkey, *The Formation of Islam*, 50.

societies, such as identities and allegiances, Late Antiquity's features and institutions, and theological and religious controversies amongst others.¹⁹³

What can be said with a greater degree of certainty and validity, is that the Arab conquests caused some radical changes in several aspects of the life and culture of the conquered populations, although they were gradual—and not always traceable—procedures. On the linguistic level, although Greek remained the official language of the administration for a short period, by the end of the seventh century this had changed in favour of Arabic.¹⁹⁴ Many Greek-speaking populations started to use the Arabic language, even for liturgical purposes, as early as the first decades of the eighth century.¹⁹⁵ Actually, the Chalcedonians were among the first Christian groups to adopt the Arabic as their language of expression. This procedure was followed by other communities, to a greater or lesser extent. In the social sphere, the status of the conquered people changed to that of *dhimmi*s, second-class citizens, who were under the protection of the state, without any obligation to join the army, in return for which they had to pay certain taxes. Additionally a number of Christians (either Chalcedonians or Monophysites, like certain Ghassānid Arabs) left (or were encouraged) to flee the occupied areas and head to the Byzantine territories (Cyprus, Asia Minor, or to southern Italy and Sicily).¹⁹⁶ For those wanting to change their status and become members of the Arab ruling elite, there was the option of conversion, something that also entailed certain socio-political consequences. On the other hand, the way they saw the world and the way they thought and acted had to be reconsidered. Finally, all the possible repercussions of the conquests should be understood and valued as procedures that needed a long time to happen, but quite significantly they should also be seen as reciprocal developments for both the conquered and the conquerors.

¹⁹³ For a further discussion, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 17-26.

¹⁹⁴ See Stroumsa, Gedaliahu G. "Religious Contacts in Byzantine Palestine," *Numen* 36 (1989), 16-42; Wasserstein, David J. "Why did Arabic Succeed Where Greek Failed? Language Change in the Near East after Muhammad," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 22 (2003), 257-272.

¹⁹⁵ See Griffith, Sidney *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine*, Aldershot 1992.

¹⁹⁶ Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 165; Kaegi, W. E. *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium*, Cambridge 2003, 278; Herrin, *The Formation*, 214; Haldon, *Byzantium*, 366. See also Auzépy, Marie-France "Le rôle des émigrés orientaux à Constantinople et dans l'empire (634-843): Acquis et perspectives," *Al-Qantara* 33 (2012), 475-503.

2. 4. *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*

The first chronological reference from Greek-Byzantine sources is found in an “unusual,”¹⁹⁷ “curious”¹⁹⁸ or “anomalous” and “strange hybrid text,”¹⁹⁹ namely the *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*.²⁰⁰ This anti-Judaic treatise was generated by Herakleios’ edict for the forced conversion and baptism of the Jews on the day of the Pentecost (31 May) 632 A.D.,²⁰¹ and it was written after this event around 634 A.D., allegedly in North Africa.²⁰² A fact adding to its importance, is its wide circulation and the number of its translations into Slavic, Arabic and Ethiopic.²⁰³

This text has been used extensively by several scholars²⁰⁴ due to its importance as the earliest non-Muslim source mentioning the appearance of an Arab prophet, and it belongs to the genre of (Christian) anti-Judaic treatises; a genre which, though flourishing in the first Christian centuries as a polemical response to Judaism, quite interestingly vigorously re-emerged in the late sixth to early eighth centuries. Although the question of the rationale of this re-emergence (as well as its scope and intentions) of anti-Judaic treatises during that period is dealt with separately in the Appendix, some words have to be said in advance about the character of this text, the problems it presents, and the possible ways to approach it.

¹⁹⁷ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 61.

¹⁹⁸ Cameron, *The Mediterranean World*, 190.

¹⁹⁹ Olster, David Michael *Roman Defeat, Christian Response, and the Literary Construction of the Jew*, Philadelphia 1994, 159 and 175.

²⁰⁰ Bonwetsch, N. (ed.) “*Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*,” *Abhandlungen der königlichen Gesellschaften zu Göttingen, philologisch-historische Klasse* 12.3, Berlin 1910; and the new edition, to which we refer to, Dagron, Gilbert & Déroche, Vincent “Juifs et chrétiens dans l’Orient du VII^e siècle,” *TM* 11 (1991), 47-229 (ed. and trans. by Déroche).

²⁰¹ See Dölger, F. *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches von 565-1025*, Fasc. 1-5, Munich, Berlin 1924-1965; cf. Maximus’ *Epistle*. See the correction of Dölger by Sharf, Andrew “Byzantine Jewry in the Seventh Century,” *BZ* 48 (1955), 109, n. 39.

²⁰² Thus Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 55 while other scholars suggest Palestine as the place of its composition (see Appendix).

²⁰³ For the textual history and transmission see Déroche, “Juifs et chrétiens,” 47-68.

²⁰⁴ Crone & Cook, *Hagarism*; Kaegi, Walter Emil Jr. “Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest,” *Church History* 38 (1969), 139-149; Cameron, Averil “Blaming the Jews: the Seventh-Century Invasions of Palestine in Context” in *Mélanges Gilbert Dagron*, *TM* 14 (2002), 57-78 among others.

The first text under examination poses one of the major difficulties for the prerequisites of this thesis, that is, the criteria under which the sources studied can be considered as Byzantine. Can we refer to this text as reflecting Byzantine ideas about our topic just because it is written in Greek, or because it is an anti-Judaic polemic treatise conforming to the Byzantine policy of that period? To what degree is the use of a particular language, a sign of allegiance or partiality?²⁰⁵ The question becomes more crucial for this particular text, since it is the first reference to the Arab Prophet and the conquests. In addition, it is inextricably linked to the issue of the proliferation of anti-Judaic treatises during the seventh century, i.e. in compliance with ideology and attitudes that are aimed at certain predetermined targets.²⁰⁶ Needless to say that connected to these issues, is the question of the credibility of the certain text: is it a true effort from a converted Jew to persuade his coreligionists about the truth of the Christian message or does it belong to the series of imaginary dialogues about these topics?

In the case that the *Doctrina* is not the genuine attempt of a converted Jew, addressed to his coreligionists, it definitely reflects Byzantine concerns and worries about the relative issues developed in it. Conversely, if we are to accept its credibility, the information it conveys about the appearance of the Prophet and the character of his campaign, acquires a strong importance and validity, because it comes to us as the independent testimony of a member of the Jewish community who, besides his conversion to Byzantine orthodoxy, discusses with his ex-community, their common concerns about the emergent phenomenon. Thus, his testimony might reveal concerns and ideas of both worlds, i.e. the Byzantine and Judaic community within the —literal and cultural— boundaries of the Byzantine Empire. Although generalisations are not justifiable, and since from the source under study, we can only infer what some of the Byzantine Jews might have thought of the Arab prophet and his message and campaigns, its examination with parallel reference to other available sources might help us to realise what were the bonds, attitudes, expectations and hopes of the Jewish populations of the empire during that

²⁰⁵ Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 21; and Cameron, “New Themes,” 86.

²⁰⁶ See Appendix.

period. As a result, a detailed analysis of the character of this text seems necessary.

As previously stated, the reason for the production of this text was Herakleios' edict for the forced baptism of the Jews in 632 A.D. Although the sources refer to it as being of general-universal implementation across the boundaries of the empire, the *Doctrina Jacobi*, as well as Maximus the Confessor's *Epistle*²⁰⁷ testify to its local application only, in the area of North Africa.²⁰⁸ As Andrew Sharf noted, this edict cannot have been very rigidly applied, even in Constantinople itself, as the author of the *Doctrina* was permitted to solemnise a commercial contract "in the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."²⁰⁹ Whatever the practical reasons for the edition of this edict might have been, according to Theophanes and Michael the Syrian,²¹⁰ such an act clearly indicates the change of Roman attitude towards other opinion, and it is part and parcel of the ongoing effort for the establishment of a monophonic political orthodoxy in this early Byzantine period, as has been quite rightly stressed by several scholars.²¹¹ The dialogue between the Byzantine eparch George and the Jews points to that direction: "And when we [the Jews] were assembled, [George] said to us, 'Are you the servants of the emperor?' And we answered and said, 'Yes, lord, we are the servants of the emperor.' And he said, 'His Goodness has ordered that you be baptised.' And when we heard this, we were shaken and were filled with great fear, and none of us dared to say what we thought. And when he said, 'Do you answer nothing?' one of us, Nonus by name, answered, saying, 'we will do nothing right now, for it is not the time for the holy baptism.' And angered, the eparch stood before him, and slapped him across the face ... And we were baptised whether we willed or no. And we were in great doubt and much

²⁰⁷ See Devreesse, R. "La fin inédite d'une lettre de St. Maxime: un baptême forcé des Juifs et des Samaritains à Carthage en 632," *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 17 (1937), 25-35; Starr, Joshua "St. Maximos and the Forced Baptism at Carthage in 632," *BNJ* 16 (1939), 192-196.

²⁰⁸ See Cameron, Averil "Byzantine and Jews: Some Recent Work on early Byzantium," *BMGS* 20 (1996), 258.

²⁰⁹ See Sharf, Andrew "Byzantine Jewry in the Seventh Century," *BZ* 48 (1955), 103-115, now in Sharf, Andrew *Jews and Other Minorities in Byzantium*, Jerusalem 1995, 103.

²¹⁰ See the relative discussion in Starr, Joshua "St. Maximos and the Forced Baptism at Carthage in 632."

²¹¹ Like Haldon; although Cameron seems to disagree with such an interpretation (see Cameron, "Blaming the Jews").

sadness.”²¹² Baptism had thus become a means for the exercise of politics, an expression of loyalty to the emperor. The Jews could not refuse, unless they wished to be branded as traitors to the state. And as Avi-Yonah stated “the linking of religion and state created a situation not dissimilar to that which existed in imperial Rome, with the only difference being that what was once a sacrifice to the emperor’s genius now became baptism.”²¹³

The work is mainly composed in a form of dialogue between Jacob, a Jew forcibly baptised and converted to Christianity, and some of his ex-coreligionists, in particular Ioustos, about the validity of the Christian faith as the fulfilment of their ancestral Judaic religion. The dialogue is set in Carthage, it runs in three sessions, and it is carried out in a secret place under cautious measures due to the fear of the Christians, as it is underlined, with great anguish every now and then. The interlocutors show considerable knowledge of geographical details connected to the activities of the Jewish communities in Palestine, as can be inferred from the reference to certain places in the text.

The *Doctrina* is addressed to the Jews and it does not seem to be produced for internal consumption, that is, to try and demonstrate to the Christians the falsity of the Judaic faith. Hoyland, pointing to this, said that this work is unusual (compared to the other anti-Judaic treatises known) in “having the intention to invite the dissenter himself to recognise this fact” (of falsity of faith).²¹⁴ The conditions under which this dialogue takes place are secretive and somewhat conspiratorial, because of the so often expressed fear that they might be revealed by Christians. Of great importance for the credibility of the dialogue, is the fact that the interlocutors express their fears for Christian persecution. Even if this is a literary device for enhancing the credibility of the text, it only appears once in this dialogue, in the whole *corpus* of the anti-Judaic treatises.

It should be noted in this context that the interlocutors are Jews (both faithful and forcibly converted to Christianity) and that there is no participation of Christians in this dialogue, which is a common feature of all

²¹² *Doctrina*, I-2.

²¹³ See Avi-Yonah, M. *The Jews of Palestine. A Political History from the Bar Kokhba War to the Arab Conquest*, Oxford 1976, 255.

²¹⁴ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 61.

the anti-Judaic tracts. Thus, the whole work is presented as a case of an internal affair between the members of a religious minority community, whatever their opinions or sympathies might be. That feature definitely helps to lower the level of polemics even if we do not take at face value the *Doctrina*. Apparently, in terms of literary devices this particular text makes use of all the available means that can lead someone to justifiably presume that it has sincere intentions to persuade the Jews about the soundness of the Christian faith as (and this is of utmost importance) the fulfilment of the Jewish religion and expectations, through the fulfilment of prophecies and their correct deciphering through the Christian hermeneutical codes. More significantly, and in stark contrast to other anti-Judaic treatises, which condemned the law as the means of punishment for a wicked and rejected people, the *Doctrina* states that the Jews should accept the ‘new law’ of Christ precisely because it accomplishes the Mosaic Law.²¹⁵

Another interesting feature of the *Doctrina* is the fact that although several well-known issues and topics like idolatry, the Virgin Mary, Jesus as the son of God and Judaic tenets and behaviour were discussed in it, the cross and icons, both widely discussed topics in the anti-Judaic treatises, are totally absent here.²¹⁶ In addition to this, the apologetic themes found in contemporary Christian works are ignored. Furthermore, there is an obvious lack of reference to the Monothelite controversies that were taking place at the same time in Carthage, and there is no reference to contemporary ecclesiastical and theological issues that were pre-dominant in social discourse during that period; therefore, the writer’s proclaimed Christian identity does not seem persuasive.

It has been frequently stressed that this text expresses Messianic hope and expectations, and because of this (or probably because it wants to answer such tantalising issues from the Jewish perspective) it quite often discusses the Messiah using both the commonly used Christian title *Christos* but the word *Eleimmenos* (anointed) as well. Both of these terms were also used by several Byzantines, and especially certain Fathers of the Church. Since in all its uses the latter’s use of the word *Eleimmenos* connotes the polemic to the Jews about

²¹⁵ Cf. Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 165.

²¹⁶ For the topics discussed in the anti-Judaic treatises, see Appendix.

the person of Jesus as the Messiah, this may add to the credibility of the text. This hints at the fact that the text is inextricably mixed with the cultural frame of the period. Furthermore, the use of the words *adonai* and *mamzeros* (which although known to the Christian environment, were not frequently used), the invocation in the name of God “of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,” which is a form of Judaic oath, as well as the term Hermolaus²¹⁷ (a mention that seems to have passed unnoticed by the scholars, although it appears here and in the *Book of Zerubbabel* for the first time)²¹⁸ indicate a certain knowledge—if not active participation— of Judaic tenets and culture. Though Déroche, in his excellent and well researched comments on the text,²¹⁹ says that there is no mention of Judaic texts, prayers or rituals (and based on these, he postulates the Christian and not Judaic provenance of the text), I think that he neglects these strong indications and the possibility of real and not imaginary contacts, discussions and debates between Christians and Jews.²²⁰ In any case, it should be remembered that we are dealing with a society where oral tradition was the rule, though the written works were starting to play a decisive role as authoritative texts,²²¹ and texts reflect the social situation concerning crucial religious debates among rival religious groups or ideas, even if they are sometimes presented in an exaggerated way. We cannot completely deny the possibility of such dialogues in polemic terms and tend to think that religious communities coexisted in a state of mutual muteness, in a social environment where religion prevalent and a decisive factor in people’s everyday lives.

The Judaic Messianism expressed in this text, is rekindled by the appearance of the prophet with the Saracens, who comes in war and sword, shedding men’s blood. This prophet allegedly says that he has the keys of

²¹⁷ Hermolaus or Armilus (the equivalent of Christian Antichrist, according to Jewish apocalypticism), is the name of the last apocalyptic enemy of the Messiah which, apart from this text, first appears in certain seventh-century texts like the *Book of Zerubbabel* (Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 318, n. 182). This name probably derives either from Romulus or Ahriman according to *JE*, s.v. “Armilus;” see also Berger, David “Three Typological Themes in Early Jewish Messianism,” *AJS Review* 10 (1985), 155-162.

²¹⁸ See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 318.

²¹⁹ See Déroche, “Juifs et chrétiens,” 47-68.

²²⁰ Opposing thus to Olster, *Roman Defeat*, passim.

²²¹ Cameron, Averil “Disputations, Polemical Literature and the Formation of Opinion in the Early Byzantine Period” in Reinink, G. J. & Vanstiphout, H. L. J. (eds) *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Mediaeval Near East: Forms and Types of Literary Debates in Semitic and Related Literatures*, Leuven 1991, 91-108; Cameron, Averil “Texts as Weapons: Polemic in the Byzantine Dark Ages” in Bowman, Alan & Wolf, Greg (eds) *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, Cambridge 1994, 198-215.

Paradise, and that he is preaching the advent of the “anointed one.” This idea that the prophet has the keys of paradise (*kleidouhos*) is a strange one, and definitely not of Arabic or Islamic origin, and it also appears in the ninth-century Byzantine text of the abjuration of the Islamic faith.²²²

This first reference to the Arab prophet who had appeared with the Saracens, though he is considered to be a false one, is accompanied by the information that certain Jews followed him: “When the *candidatus* was killed by the Saracens, I was at Caesarea and I set off by boat to Sykamina. People were saying ‘the *candidatus* has been killed,’ and we Jews were overjoyed. And they were saying that the prophet had appeared, coming with the Saracens, and that he was proclaiming the advent of the anointed one, the Christ who was to come. I, having arrived at Sykamina, stopped by a certain old man well-versed in the scriptures, and I said to him: ‘What can you tell me about the prophet who has appeared with the Saracens?’ He replied, groaning deeply: ‘He is false, for the prophets do not come armed with a sword. Truly they are works of anarchy being committed today and I fear that the first Christ to come, whom the Christians worship, was the one sent by God and we instead are preparing to receive Hermolaus [the Antichrist]. Indeed, Isaiah said that the Jews would retain a perverted and hardened heart until all the earth should be devastated. But you go, master Abraham, and find out about the prophet who has appeared.’ So I, Abraham, inquired and heard from those who had met him that there was no truth to be found in the so-called prophet, only the shedding of men’s blood. He says also that he has the keys of paradise, which is incredible.”²²³

The mention of the appeared prophet as the Antichrist is telling of the common ground of the messianic and apocalyptic interpretations and ideas, shared both by Jews and Christians; and it is interesting that this term was also used by Sophronius in his *Sermon on the Holy Baptism*,²²⁴ and it was going to

²²² “I anathematize the secret doctrine of the Saracens and promise of Moameth that he would become the gatekeeper (*kleidouhos*) of paradise...,” PG 140, 129B. See also, Crone & Cook, *Hagarism*, 4, 152.

²²³ *Doctrina Jacobi* V. 16, 4-19, (trans. by Hoyland).

²²⁴ See Papadopoulos-Kerameus, A. (ed.) “Τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Σωφρονίου ἀρχιεπισκόπου Ἱεροσολύμων λόγος εἰς τὸ ἅγιον βάπτισμα,” *Ἀνάλεκτα Ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς σταχυολογίας*, vol. 5, St. Petersburg 1898; repr. Brussels 1963, 166.25; and Theophanes, 339.22-24 respectively.

be of standard use (with certain differentiations) thereafter, for both Muhammad and the Saracens.

A striking feature of the *Doctrina*, compared to other anti-Judaic as well as Byzantine texts of that period, is its assertion that the Roman Empire was in decline and its fall is imminent, a pessimistic view that has no parallel in seventh-century literature.²²⁵ “In what situation do you think Romania is? Is it standing as at the beginning or is it diminishing? ... Even if it is diminished a little, we hope that it will erect again· because first Christ should arrive as long as the fourth beast stands, that is Romania.” (III, 8.38-42) “From the ocean, that is from Scotland and Britain and from Spain and France and Italy and Greece and Thrace and up to Antioch and Syria and Persia and all the east and Egypt and beyond Africa the borders of the Romans and the signs of their emperors made of stone and copper are apparent until today. For all the nations have been subjugated to Romans by God’s command; but today we see Romania humbled.” (III, 10.3-8) “We see the fourth beast, namely Romania, destroyed and ravaged by nations ...” (IV, 5. 42-43).

The whole subject is viewed and discussed under apocalyptic and messianic expectations, hence the references to the status of Romania and the discussion of the apocalyptic scheme of the last days according to Daniel’s vision. Concerning the ten horns of Daniel’s narrative, which represent the ten dynasties that should appear before the Second Coming, the *Doctrina* comments that the tenth horn corresponds to the Romans. It is due to the fulfilment of this certain prophecy that Romania, i.e. Byzantium, has to collapse, thus facilitating the advent of the Messiah. The *Doctrina* seems to fit in well—and in accordance with—the Judaic apocalyptic atmosphere of that time, as the contemporary Jewish apocalyptic texts, like *The Secrets of Rabbi Simon ben Yohai* and the *Signs of the Messiah* reveal.²²⁶ And, regarding the emergence of the *Doctrina*, it seems that the Jews regarded the new persecutions and forced baptism as signs that announced the coming of the Messiah.²²⁷

²²⁵ Cf. Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 158, 168.

²²⁶ For which see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 308-312, 317-318.

²²⁷ Cf. Avi-Yonah, *The Jews of Palestine*, 255.

Thus, the apocalyptic and Messianic expectations and interpretations prepare the way for the apocalyptic texts at the end of the century and reveal the shared concerns between Byzantines and Jews at that time, which seems to be pregnant with apocalyptic semantics, both in fears and schemes of interpretations. It is significant that the text talks of the appeared prophet and the invasions of the Saracens in terms interesting to the Jewish community. It does not seek, or allude to, an explanation of their invasions, contrary to the contemporary causations proffered by the Christian writers as the tool of God's wrath and the means of chastisement for the sins committed by the Christian population.

2. 5. Maximus the Confessor (d. 662)

Maximus' life and theology is inextricably connected with the ideological and cultural context of the seventh century. Moreover, he was the most influential Byzantine theologian of that century both in the West and the East, and his theological concepts defined the dogmatic articulation of the Sixth Ecumenical Council. Consequently, a closer attention needs to be paid to his biography. Maximus' biographical details about his early life and career are confusing due to the fact that the existing Byzantine *Lives*²²⁸ present him as being of Constantinopolitan origin whereas a Syriac *Life*, presented by Brock,²²⁹ renders him a Palestinian background. The most commonly used Byzantine *Lives* seem to consist of compilations modelled on the *Life* of Theodore of Studion from the tenth century, apparently without direct evidence of historical details,²³⁰ although as it has been argued by Bratke²³¹ another *Life* derives from c. 680, whereas the Syriac *Life* comes from the seventh century from the pen of George of Resh'aina (d. ca. 680), a member

²²⁸ See Halkin *BHG*; Serwood, *Annotated Date List*.

²²⁹ Brock, Sebastian "An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor," *AB* 91 (1973), 299-346.

²³⁰ Lackner, Wolfgang "Zu Quellen und Datierung der Maximus vita (*BHG*³ 1234)," *AB* 85 (1967), 285-316; Louth, Andrew *Maximus the Confessor*, London 1996, 4.

²³¹ Bratke, Ad Sancti Maximi vitam.

of the Sophronius clergy.²³² Acceptance of either version's details is further complicated by the fact that the Syrian author is a Monothelete and an opponent of Maximus' theology and, apart from his polemic and hostile attitude towards Maximus, certain elements and historical references of his account are not only doubtful, as Hoyland states,²³³ but undoubtedly wrong; and this is against George's credibility, who claims to be an eyewitness.²³⁴ On the other hand, accepting either the Constantinopolitan or the Palestinian background of Maximus might result in certain repercussions concerning Maximus' later life and career accordingly.²³⁵ As a result, the acceptance of the veracity of *Syriac Life* from Hoyland and Brock seems hasty and unjustified, notwithstanding its plausibility in certain parts;²³⁶ on the contrary, it seems more justifiable to follow the account of the *Byzantine Life*, whilst underlining the restraints concerning its afore-mentioned discrepancies.²³⁷

Maximus —the greatest Byzantine theologian of the seventh century— born from Constantinopolitan parents, entered the service of the Imperial Chancellery under Herakleios, a post he renounced a few years later in favour of monasticism.²³⁸ Due to the Persian invasions, he and his companions were obliged to flee southwards from their monastery in Asia Minor, and after passing from Crete and Cyprus, ended up in Carthage in North Africa around 630. There he came into contact with other refugees, and most importantly with Sophronius, the future patriarch of Jerusalem, to whom he referred to as his “blessed master ...father and teacher.”²³⁹ Sophronius exercised a strong influence upon him, especially alerting him to the imminent dangers facing the Christian faith from the newly appeared heretical aspects concerning the one will and energy (*thelema and energeia*) of Christ, namely Monotheletism–Monoenergism. Maximus joined his forces in the fight

²³² See Brock, “An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor,” 300, and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 139.

²³³ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 140.

²³⁴ Brock, “An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor,” text: V, 304-305.

²³⁵ Refer to relevant bibliography and questions.

²³⁶ Cf. also Sahas, Daniel J. “The Demonizing Force of the Arab Conquests. The Case of Maximus (ca 580-662) as a Political ‘Confessor’,” *JÖB* 53 (2003), 97-116. Although the *Syrian Life* calls for a further investigation and examination of the historical sources.

²³⁷ In any case, it is not at all plausible and justifiable to take the information on Maximus' childhood from the *Syriac Life* and add it to the account of the *Greek Life*, as both Kazhdan (*ODB*) and Hoyland seem to do. Cf. Louth, Andrew *Maximus*, 199, n.11.

²³⁸ Lackner, Wolfgang “Der Amtstitel Maximus des Bekenners,” *JÖB* 20 (1971), 63-65.

²³⁹ Maximus, *Ep.* 13, *PG* 91, 533A; *Diffloatio* 74 *ex epistola eiusdem*, *PG* 91, 142A.

against Monotheletism, by means of his works, teaching and public dialogues.²⁴⁰ However, Herakleios issued the famous *Ekthesis* in 638, forbidding (by so doing) any further discussion on the issue of the one or two energies of Christ, while recognising the Monothelete creed as the official belief. In the same year the devoted Monothelete, Pyrrhus ascended to the patriarchal see of the capital. Maximus, realising that the Roman Church was opposed to the imperial and patriarchal attitudes towards the new heresy, left Carthage for Rome around late 645 or early 646. In Rome, he organised, and heavily influenced the Lateran Council in 649,²⁴¹ which denounced Monotheletism and anathematised both the *Ekthesis* of Herakleios and the *Typos* of Constans. For this opposition, he —like pope Martin in 653— was arrested and taken to Constantinople in 662. After interrogation and trial, he was exiled to Cherson, in the same year. Haldon’s persuasive interpretation of Maximus’ trial as an issue of conflicting authorities between the emperor and the Church makes clear the ideological shifts taking place during that period.²⁴²

Maximus, although highly involved in the theological controversies and his strife against Monotheletism, found the time to make a short reference to the Arab invasions in a letter addressed to Peter, governor of Numidia. This also mentioned “the God-honoured pope,” i.e. Cyrus the Alexandrian patriarch (which dates the letter as been between 634 and 640).²⁴³ In this letter, after a dogmatic exposition of his theology and advice about vigilance and prayers, he turns to contemporary circumstances and continues: “For indeed, what is more dire than the evils which today afflict the world? What is more terrible for the discerning than the unfolding events? What is more pitiable and frightening for those who endure them? To see a barbarous people of the desert overrunning another’s lands as though they were their own; to see civilisation [*hemere politeia*] itself being ravaged by wild and

²⁴⁰ In Carthage with Pyrrhus, the monothelete patriarch of Constantinople.

²⁴¹ See Herrin, *The Formation*, 217-219.

²⁴² For which see Haldon, John “Ideology and the Byzantine State in the Seventh Century: the ‘Trial’ of Maximus Confessor” in Vavřínek, Vladimír (ed.) *From Late Antiquity to Early Byzantium: proceedings of the Byzantinological Symposium in the 16th International Eirene Conference*, Academia, Praha 1985, 87-91; and Sahas, “The Demonizing Force of the Arab Conquests. The Case of Maximus (ca 580-662) as a Political ‘Confessor’.”

²⁴³ See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 77.

untamed beasts whose form alone is human ... What is more terrifying, I say [as I said],²⁴⁴ for the eyes and ears of Christians than to see a cruel and alien nation authorised to raise its hand against the divine inheritance? But it is the multitude of sins committed by us that has allowed this.”²⁴⁵

The attitude expressed in this brief mention about the invading Arabs, is remarkably coloured by already known and commonly used schemes of expressing Roman detestation towards marauding Arabs, as well as of the feeling of Roman superiority. The desert dwellers are thought of as barbarous, due to their dwelling outside the limits of the civilised world, i.e. the Roman territory, which they attack and ravage because, most probably, this is the only pragmatic relationship that these anthropomorphous wild beasts can have with civilisation, not understanding its internal value and thinking of it only as ‘precious prey’. The antithesis between the civilised Roman Empire and the barbarous people of the desert is further enhanced by the literary contrast between wild and untamed beasts and the civilised (lit. tame, meek) state, a contrast that had an indulging fascination for the Roman self-image and had been in circulation for several centuries. The cause for such calamities, according to the same scheme, is the sinful behaviour of the Christians and the remedy, as it is clearly expressed towards the end of that letter, is vigilance, prayer and quite significantly readiness to profess true faith in front of people, without fear of death, even at the cost of martyrdom.²⁴⁶

Interestingly enough, immediately after this mention, Maximus turns against the Jews in a fierce outburst, disproportionally bigger than that against the Arabs: “To see the Jewish people who have long delighted in seeing flow the blood of men, who know no other means of pleasing God than destroying His creation ... who deem themselves to be serving God well by doing precisely what He detests, who are the most deprived of faith in the world and so the most ready to welcome hostile forces ... who announce by their actions the presence of the Antichrist since they ignored that of the true Saviour ... this people who are the master of falsehood, the agent of crime, the enemy of

²⁴⁴ This should be rendered like this, with the meaning “as I said earlier” and not as “as I say.”

²⁴⁵ Maximus, *Ep.* 14, *PG* 91, 540A (trans. by Hoyland, 77-78). The last sentence (*PG* 91, 541B) should be better situated here and not to the concluding part of Maximus’ outburst against Jews as in Hoyland’s presentation (78), due to reasons of coherence and intelligibility of his previous reference to the Arabs. See below in the text.

²⁴⁶ *Ep.* 14, *PG* 91, 541-544.

truth, the savage persecutor of the faith.”²⁴⁷ As I previously mentioned,²⁴⁸ the quotation *PG* 91, 541B should be read and understood contextually as the concluding part of the reference to the Arabs (and not in fragments as Hoyland’s reading might imply),²⁴⁹ mainly for two reasons. Firstly, it does not fit at all with his accusations against the Jews: the cruel and alien (an epithet that corroborates its rendering to the Arabs) nation that was allowed to raise its hand against (metaphorically attack) the divine inheritance (i.e. the Christians)²⁵⁰ was the Arabs and not the Jews.²⁵¹ And secondly, because Maximus’ account follows a cyclical scheme of narration, thus concluding with similar expressions to those he had started with, using the same wording and the same use of the comparative form: he starts by saying “what is more dire ... what is more terrible ... what is more pitiable and frightening for those who endure them” and concludes “What is more terrifying ... for the eyes and ears of Christians”;²⁵² and inside this scheme, he includes his accusations against Jews. The insertion of the phrase *hos efen* (as I [earlier] said), as a trope, enhances and enables the reader to recall the beginning of the account, and corroborates with the conceptual ascription of this fragment to the invading Arabs and not the Jews. I would suggest then, that the whole reference should be read and comprehended as a single contextual account.

As a result, the easily dismissed outburst by Maximus against the Jews, as a rhetorical anti-Judaic convention (similar to those expressed in the anti-Judaic treatises of the seventh century), or as the expression of an “eschatological drama with the Jews occupying the leading role” and the Arabs as “simply extras,”²⁵³ does not sound persuasive. Actually this outburst might generate the intriguing question: why should Maximus make such a reference to the Jews when talking about invading Arabs? What possible Jewish involvement might be implied by the words: “the Jewish people who

²⁴⁷ Maximus, *Ep.* 14, *PG* 91, 540A-541B, (trans. by Hoyland, 77-78).

²⁴⁸ N. 245.

²⁴⁹ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 28, 528.

²⁵⁰ See “*Eklektos de laos kleronomia Theou prosagoreuomenos, palai men ho Ioudaikos, meta de tauta, ho ek ton ethnon eklegeis kai tes pisteos tas aktinas dehomenos*,” Thdt., *Int. in Ps.*, 80.1100.

²⁵¹ This is also the reading of Sahas, “The Demonizing Force of the Arab Conquests. The Case of Maximus (ca 580-662) as a Political ‘Confessor’,” 104.

²⁵² This is more emphatic in the Greek original: “*Ti ... peristatikoteron; ti ... deinoteron; ti ... eleeinoteron é foberoteron; Ethnos ... — ti ... foberoteron; Ethnos ...*”

²⁵³ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 78.

have long delighted in seeing flow the blood of men, who know no other means of pleasing God than destroying His creation ... who deem themselves to be serving God well by doing precisely what He detests, who are the most deprived of faith in the world and so the most ready to welcome hostile forces, and prepare by any way and disposition the advent of the devil; and who announce by their actions the presence of the Antichrist since they ignored that of the true Saviour?" Is it possible that Maximus expresses fears that the Jews might "welcome hostile forces ... by any way and disposition,"²⁵⁴ in order to overthrow the Christian Empire? Although his works do not allow for an affirmative response to the question of a Judaic contribution to the Arab conquests—as is explicitly stated in the *Doctrina* for example—the hypothesis that he might have been informed either of this, or of certain (probably messianic?) reactions of the Jews in North Africa during the Arab invasions, has to be seriously considered. Or might he also reflect official accusations and worries (due to his connection with the African governors Peter and George),²⁵⁵ to which he might implicitly hint at in this letter. In connection with this, it should not be forgotten that the *Doctrina's* dialogues, as well as the forced baptism of the Jews, had taken place in Carthage, in the very same place where Maximus also resided during that period. If such a hypothesis holds true, and I am really inclined to believe that this is the case, it seems that the Arab danger was not minimised due to the exaggeration of the Judaic danger; and the Jews might have had the role of forerunners and helpers in the pursuance of the eschatological drama, which would be carried out by the Arabs.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Although the gloss used derives from—and is referred to—the religious and spiritual vocabulary, its allegoric juncture to reality should not be excluded, due to the literary ways of expressions of the Byzantine writers.

²⁵⁵ Being the addresses of certain of his Epistles.

²⁵⁶ Cf. also Cameron, "Blaming the Jews." Having reached to this hypothesis, I came across Laga's article in which for the first time expresses a similar question although he sees in these expressions (like the similar ones of Sophronius) nothing else "but two aspects of the same punitive act of God—in Maximus' case even with an eschatological dimension;" see Laga, Carl "Judaism and Jews in Maximus Confessor's Works: Theoretical Controversy and Practical Attitude," *BS* 51 (1990), 188; similarly Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 78. For Maximus' relation of Arab invasions to eschatological signs, see also Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 218.

2. 6. Sophronius, patriarch of Jerusalem (d. ca. 639)²⁵⁷

Sophronius was born and raised in Damascus, where he obtained a classical education and soon, due to his rhetoric skills, received the title of “sophist.”²⁵⁸ He left Damascus seeking to enrich his learning and education, first stopping at the monastery of St. Theodosius near Jerusalem. There he met John Moschus, the person who was going to be—in his own words— his spiritual father and instructor (*pater pneumatikos kai didaskalos*), as well as a companion on his future trips.²⁵⁹ After further studies in Alexandria, he returned to St. Theodosius’ monastery and became a monk. Together with John, being among the last to practise the peripatetic asceticism known as *xeniteia*, they travelled extensively in the Near East (Syria, Egypt, the Aegean, staying for longer periods in Alexandria and Mount Sinai). They came into contact with several ascetics and holy men whose exemplary lives, teachings and sayings greatly benefited their own spiritual progress. After the Persian invasions they moved to Rome, from where Sophronius left them, after John’s death, and returned to St. Theodosius. In the monastery he edited John’s *Pratum Spirituale* and composed several religious works along with his famous *anakreontica* poems written in the classical style; one of them is a lament on the fall and sack of Jerusalem by the Persians.²⁶⁰ Sometime in the 620s he travelled to North Africa, where he met Maximus the Confessor, with whom he formed a strong and deep friendship.²⁶¹ Soon both of them became engaged in, and passionately devoted themselves to, the fight against both Monophysitism and the recently appeared heretical views of Monotheletism, staunchly defending the Chalcedonian faith. When Sophronius returned to Jerusalem in 633, constrained by the demands of the citizens and the clergy, he accepted the patriarchal see of the holy city. This post gave him the chance to further pursue his struggle against Monophysitism and the recently

²⁵⁷ For the life, the works and theology of Sophronius see the magisterial work of von Scönborn, Christoph *Sophrone de Jérusalem: vie monastique et confession dogmatique*, Paris 1972.

²⁵⁸ Scönborn identified Sophronius the sophist with Sophronius the patriarch, 239-242.

²⁵⁹ See Chadwick, Henry “John Moschus and his Friend Sophronius the Sophist,” *JfTS* 25 (1974), 41-74.

²⁶⁰ Edited by Gigante, M. *Sophronii Anacreontica*, Roma 1957; see also Wilken, Robert L. *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought*, New Haven and London 1992, ch. 11 for comments on this lament.

²⁶¹ See n. 239, above.

politically promulgated Monotheletism and Monoenergism from emperor Herakleios and patriarch Sergius. And it is exactly his theological argumentation against Monophysitism and his defence of the Chalcedonian orthodoxy that prevail in his synodical letter, where the first of his references to the invading Arabs appears. Although this letter has no chronological reference whatsoever, it seems to have been written around the summer of 634.²⁶² In the last part of this letter, Sophronius wishes that God may grant to “our Christ-loving and most gentle emperors a strong and vigorous sceptre to break the pride of all the barbarians, and especially of the Saracens who, on account of our sins, have now risen up against us unexpectedly and ravage all with cruel and feral design, with impious and godless audacity. More than ever, therefore, we entreat your Holiness to make urgent petitions to Christ so that he, receiving these favourably from you, may quickly quell their mad insolence and deliver these vile creatures, as before, to be the footstool of our God-given emperors.”²⁶³ Sophronius is greatly surprised by the Arab invasions in the area of Palestine as the use of the adverb *unexpectedly* (*adoketos*) shows, although there is nothing to indicate that he considers them to be as more grave than the usual and temporary raids experienced until then. That seems to happen in his next mention in the *Christmas Sermon* he delivered in Jerusalem in December 634 (not later than six months after his synodical letter).²⁶⁴ At that time, however, there might have been a heightened awareness of the Arab threat, because the approach of the invading Arabs in the vicinity of Jerusalem could have brought back memories of the terrifying Persian invasion and sack of Jerusalem in 614.²⁶⁵

In this sermon, explaining the reasons that prevented the usual ritual procession to Bethlehem, he says: “We, however, because of our innumerable sins and serious misdemeanours, are unable to see things, and are prevented from entering Bethlehem by way of the road. Unwillingly, indeed, contrary to our wishes, we are required to stay at home, not bound closely by bodily

²⁶² For the date see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 69. The theological aspects expressed there are discussed by Schönborn, *Sophrone de Jérusalem*, 201-224.

²⁶³ Sophronius, *Ep. Synodica*; Mansi, 11.505-508 & *PG* 87, 3197D-3200A (trans. by Hoyland, 69).

²⁶⁴ The date is extracted due to Sophronius’ reference that Christmas occurred on a Sunday.

²⁶⁵ Cf. Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 71.

bonds, but bound by fear of the Saracens.”²⁶⁶ Using well-known biblical images, he compares his situation to that of Adam, who was excluded from paradise although “we do not see the twisting flaming sword, but rather the wild and barbarous Saracen [sword], which is filled with every diabolical savagery.”²⁶⁷ He reminds his flock of Moses, who was forbidden to enter the holy land, as well as of David’s exile from Bethlehem by the Philistine army “so now the army of the godless Saracens has captured the divine Bethlehem and bars our passage there, threatening slaughter and destruction if we leave this holy city and dare to approach our beloved and sacred Bethlehem”.²⁶⁸

Quite clearly, the reason for such calamities is the “innumerable sins and serious misdemeanours,” the remedy of which is living according to God’s will: “If we were to live as is dear and pleasing to God, we would rejoice over the fall of the Saracen enemy and observe their near ruin and witness their final demise. For their blood-loving blade will enter their hearts, their bow will be broken and their arrows will be fixed in them.”²⁶⁹ Significantly though, even under these conditions, Sophronius’ concerns and priorities have to do with the right belief and heresy, as is stated further on: “we could blunt the Ishmaelite sword and turn aside the Saracen dagger and break the Hagarene bow ... if we follow his paternal [God’s] will and we have true and orthodox faith,”²⁷⁰ which is another way of saying that they should remain true to the Chalcedonian doctrine: “He [Jesus] was true God and God’s son. His nature was one with the Father, while he showed himself in appearance as a man like us. In two natures did he appear, as God and as man, yet in no way separated. He remains one Christ, no alteration or adulteration touches him, no cleavage or division.”²⁷¹

An alerting awareness of the character of the Arab invasions appears in the last reference he makes to them, in his *Sermon on the Holy Baptism*, for

²⁶⁶ Usener, Sophronius, *Christmas Sermon*, 506 (trans. by Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 70).

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 507.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 514.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 515.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 508. It is interesting that in this rhetorical scheme, he eloquently connects the most commonly used names of the Arabs with the most commonly used martial weapons, implying that these people are synonymous to wars, slaughters and devastation.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 515, (trans. by Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 71).

the feast of the Epiphany on January 6th of 636 or 637.²⁷² The greatest part of his sermon is a theological exegesis of Jesus' baptism by John, in which he also seizes the chance to express the doctrine of the hypostatical union of two natures in Jesus once more, as the Father himself witnessed at on Jesus' baptism that "Christ is of the same divinity as the begetter."²⁷³ Before the end of his sermon though, he starts talking about the Arab invasions, enumerating the atrocities that they brought upon the population and the land of Palestine: "But the present circumstances are forcing me to think differently about our way of life, for why are [so many] wars being fought among us? Why do barbarian raids abound? Why are the troops of the Saracens attacking us? Why has there been so much destruction and plunder? Why are there incessant outpourings of human blood? Why are the birds of the sky devouring human bodies? Why have churches been pulled down? Why is the cross mocked? Why is Christ, who is the dispenser of all good things and the provider of this joyousness of ours, blasphemed by pagan mouths (*ethnikois tois stomasi*) so that he justly cries to us: 'Because of you my name is blasphemed among the pagans,' and this is the worst of all the terrible things that are happening to us. That is why the vengeful and God-hating Saracens, the abomination of desolation clearly foretold to us by the prophets, overrun the places which are not allowed to them, plunder cities, devastate fields, burn down villages, set on fire the holy churches, overturn the sacred monasteries, oppose the Byzantine (*Roman*) armies arrayed against them, and in fighting raise up the trophies [of war] and add victory to victory. Moreover, they are raised up more and more against us and increase their blasphemies of Christ and the Church, and utter wicked blasphemies against God. These God-fighters boast of prevailing over all, assiduously and unrestrictedly imitating their leader, who is the devil, and emulating his vanity because of which he has been expelled from heaven and been assigned to the gloomy shades. Yet these vile ones would not have accomplished this nor seized such a degree of power as to do and utter lawlessly all these things, unless we had first insulted

²⁷² In Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 71, n. 58, the month should be corrected accordingly from December to January, because Epiphany was always celebrated on 6th January (for a quick and convenient reference see art. Epiphany in *ODB*).

²⁷³ Papadopoulos-Kerameus, A. (ed.) "Τοῦ ἐν ἀγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Σωφρονίου ἀρχιεπισκόπου Ἱεροσολύμων λόγος εἰς τὸ ἅγιον βάπτισμα," *Ἀνάλεκτα Ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς σταχυολογίας*, vol. 5, 151-168, St. Petersburg 1898; repr. Brussels 1963, 159.

the gift [of baptism] and first defiled the purification, and in this way grieved Christ, the giver of gifts, and prompted him to be angry with us, good though he is and though he takes no pleasure in evil, being the fount of kindness and not wishing to behold the ruin and destruction of men. We are ourselves, in truth, responsible for all these things and no word will be found for our defence. What word or place will be given us for defence when we have taken all these gifts from him, befouled them and defiled everything with our vile actions?”²⁷⁴ He then concludes by calling twice for repentance “because there has not been granted upon us other hope for salvation (*soteria*).”

The tone then changes.²⁷⁵ The invasions, due to their repercussions, are not so blurred and remote, they come closer and become factual and apparent by the extensive description of slaughter and damage. The Arabs are explicitly mentioned as the abomination of desolation, and they take their place in the eschatological scheme. The previously called ‘barbarians’ and ‘godless’ (in the *Christmas Sermon*) are now branded as God-hating (*theomiseis*) and God-fighters (*theomahoi*). Moreover, there are certain accusations not found in the usual Christian rhetoric: the Saracens mock the cross and blaspheme Jesus. In addition to this, because of their continuous military successes against the imperial Byzantine army, they become so arrogant that they boast that they prevail over all.

Hoyland remarks that Sophronius’ polemic, coming at the end of his sermon, serves merely as “a vivid example of why one should repent and reform” and that the significance of the Arab raids lays in their utility as a manifestation of Jesus’ disapproval of the Christians’ life and conduct; the appearance of the Arabs is assumed by Sophronius as “just another in a very long succession of Arab raids.”²⁷⁶ Olster on the other hand, —without any reference to this particular sermon— claims that “the Arabs were a far more pressing problem [than the Monothelete controversy], and one which, even if Sophronius rarely addressed it directly, most powerfully influenced him;”²⁷⁷ and to whose response, Sophronius suggested the liturgification of Christian

²⁷⁴ Papadopoulos-Kerameus, “Τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Σωφρονίου ἀρχιεπισκόπου Ἱεροσολύμων λόγος εἰς τὸ ἅγιον βάπτισμα,” 155-156 (trans. by Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 72-73).

²⁷⁵ Cf. Scönbörn, *Sophrone de Jérusalem*, 91.

²⁷⁶ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 73.

²⁷⁷ Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 111.

life as the means of a Christian victory, because “defeat of the Arabs mattered less than individual Christian salvation.”²⁷⁸ Olster claims that Sophronius, by rejecting the validity of imperial victory and restoration as a persuasive response to the defeat, was aiming at an internal, psychological victory, which could be attained through the Christians’ mystical union with Christ, through liturgy, and which could make the Arabs’ destructive presence “ultimately irrelevant.”²⁷⁹ What is implied here, in other words, is that Sophronius might be suggesting to his flock that they should adjust to living in a Church without an empire from then on.

At this point, certain objections must be expressed, concerning Olster’s suggestions. Sophronius had bitter experiences and terrifying memories of the Persian invasions and the sack of Jerusalem in 614, which he subsequently transferred into his lament on the fall of Jerusalem. Yet, being an —ecclesiastic— man of his era (the patriarch of Jerusalem), he believed in the prevailing Christian (but biblical in origin) exegetical scheme that God punished sin with defeat and forgave it with victory. Thus, he should have been fully aware of the temporary character of the invasions and raids, and, at the same time, optimistic about future restoration. The fact, however, that he experienced escalating violence and successive waves of invasions might have alerted him to the probable dangers or the consequences of these invasions. In addition to this, the withdrawal of imperial power, during the Persian occupation, had left only the institution of the Church to take care of the needs of the conquered Christians. Consequently, he aim became to gather his flock around the Church. And due to both his experience and his pastoral duty — imposed by his high ecclesiastical rank and responsibility— he might have deliberately not wanted to raise the hopes of his flock. Having said this, it should be stressed that I do not suggest that Sophronius proposed a rejection of the imperial victory together with the existing model of the Byzantine Empire. It is rather his theology and experience that in all probability pressed him, under those circumstances, to change the focus and aims of the Palestinian population from hope to imperial victory into internal union with Christ. It does not seem to be a rejection of the belief in imperial victory, but

²⁷⁸ Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 109.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

rather an attempt (based on pragmatic reasons, i.e. reliance on the Church, the only institution that could meet the needs of the population after imperial power had been withdrawn) to encourage the Christians to withstand and endure any hardships they encountered so that they would emerge victorious. A supportive element for such a view is his use of the example of the Magi in his *Christmas Sermon*, who although facing Herod's sword and insanity, had not wavered from their steadfast decision to worship Christ's divinity. Likewise, it is suggested that the Christians should take courage and not let fear of the Arabs hinder their relationship and union with Christ.²⁸⁰

The liturgification of Byzantine life, on the other hand, was a rather focal feature and an on-going process of the seventh century Byzantine society.²⁸¹ The liturgification of the enthronement and the coronation of the emperor, from the late-sixth century onwards, is a telling example of this tendency.²⁸² Furthermore, Maximus the Confessor proposed in his works this kind of mystical union and liturgification that Olster indicates in Sophronius' works, apparently with much greater emphasis and intensity. His *Mystagogia* and the presentation and Comments upon Ps. Dionysius the Areopagite's Works corroborate the validity of such a thesis. In this endeavour then, Sophronius was not alone, but he instead followed a major tendency both of Byzantine society and theology. As Olster himself acknowledges, "Sophronius' sacramental theology was inextricably linked to his social and political context."²⁸³ Hence, Olster's claim that "Maximus had limited heresy to the emperor and his coterie; Sophronius extended the sin of heresy to the Christian community"²⁸⁴ seems unjustifiable. On the contrary, Maximus, apart from his accusations against the imperial promulgation of heresy, also accused the Christians of being transformed into beasts fighting each other

²⁸⁰ *Christmas Sermon*, 505-506. Cf. also Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 108.

²⁸¹ See Cameron, Averil "Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium," *Past and Present* 84 (1979), 6-15; Magdalino, Paul "The History of the Future and Its Uses: Prophecy, Policy and Propaganda" in Beaton, Roderick & Roueché, Charlotte (eds) *The Making of Byzantine History: Studies Dedicated to Donald M. Nicol*, Variorum, Aldershot 1993, 13.

²⁸² A process that started with Phocas' coronation in 602, and stressed the interdependence of the state and the Church. See Haldon, *Byzantium*, 284. For the emperor's role and participation to the church ritual, see Majeska, George P. "The Emperor in His Church: Imperial Ritual in the Church of St. Sophia" in Maguire Henry (ed.), *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, Washington D.C. 1997, 1-11.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

(defending and supporting heretical views and opinions, extending the accusations of heresy to the Christians as well), and he suggested that the only way of facing defeat was the confession of true faith even if that imposed the penalty of death.²⁸⁵ In any case, it should not be forgotten that Maximus and Sophronius, both pre-eminent theological figures of the seventh century, had developed a strong friendship and spiritual relationship, which influenced their theological thought.

During the greatest part of the seventh century, the fight against heresy and deviation from faith was the most important and expressive characteristic of the growing intolerance towards religious dissension, which also heavily preoccupied the social and religious discourse of the same period. Both Maximus and Sophronius are well known for using a great part of their theological skills and efforts in order to fight against Monothelism and defend Chalcedonian orthodoxy. And their stance makes its presence felt inside their theological writings. As has been rightly pointed out, Sophronius' *Christmas Sermon* "is actually extremely concerned to press the anti-Monothelite views of its author against rival Christian beliefs."²⁸⁶ And due to such an ubiquitous and dominant concern and preoccupation, contemporary events and circumstances might not have been conceived, felt or presented the way their significance and repercussions called for. At the same time though, it should not be forgotten that these authors were heavily engaged in the fight against heresy, due to their theological stance and inclinations, but above all, because this is what their politico-social context and pastoral task dictated them to do. And it is this task that should also be considered when dealing with the reference to the Arab invasions. Thus, leaving aside the rhetorical schemes and tropes, and deciphering the religious vocabulary used, Sophronius' references to Arabs might suggest more than Hoyland infers. The presentation of the Arabs in the *Christmas Sermon* is different to that in the *Sermon on the Holy Baptism*. In the former, the references to the Arabs are scattered throughout the majority the text, but there is no alerting nuance or colouring; it seems as though all these references, based upon previous and long-established preconceptions of the Arabs, function like a distant and

²⁸⁵ See n. 246.

²⁸⁶ Cameron, Averil "The Eastern Provinces in the Seventh Century," 299.

faraway setting, upon which the reflections of Sophronius are drawn; the characterisation of the Arabs does not go beyond the already known epithets and (mis)apprehensions. As a result, someone might suppose that, if there was no hint of the prohibition to travel to Bethlehem, the whole reference could have been understood and interpreted as a typical allegoric *topos* and metaphor for the spiritual fight — so frequently used in the religious literature of that time. Besides this, there is the clearly expressed hope and optimism that the situation is not irreversible and things can change.

In the latter instance though, the whole presentation has changed considerably. The placement of the “most detailed”²⁸⁷ description of the Arabs’ appearance at the end of the sermon in a solid and concrete reference, without the interference of other elements, alarmingly points to its significance and to the repercussions that the invasion might have had in the minds and thoughts of both Sophronius’ and his flock. The long and detailed description of the bloodshed and devastation of land, villages, churches and monasteries, manifests the increasing awareness and worry of the patriarch towards the future. Moreover, as has been previously mentioned, the invaders attain more vile, ferocious and anti-Christian (as well as eschatological) characteristics and attitudes. These anti-Christian features are the insults and blasphemies against the cross, Jesus and God. Although coined in a religious gloss, at the same time these references might hint at specific and distinct views of the invading Arabs, concerning their denial of Jesus’ divinity and their rejection of the symbol of the cross. Finally, apart from assigning the Arabs a destructive role in the unfolding of the eschatological drama (the exploitation of which will abound with the apocalyptic texts by the end of the seventh century),²⁸⁸ Sophronius does not fail to subscribe them to the same grouping-list with all the other well-known deviators (Jews, heretics), referring to them as pagans). If this was indeed the case, Sophronius pretty soon (around 637-638) would have his chance to be informed first hand about what the Arabs might have thought, believed or practised, as he himself

²⁸⁷ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 71.

²⁸⁸ It is interesting to note that in his *Sermon on the Holy Baptism*, he calls them “the abomination of desolation,” (p. 166, l. 25) the well-known phrase from Daniel’s prophesy. It is also the term by which he calls ‘Umar b. al- Khattāb, when he first saw him while surrendering the city of Jerusalem (*Theophanes*, 339).

surrendered Jerusalem, on behalf of its citizens, to ‘Umar b. al- Khaṭṭāb and his army;²⁸⁹ although he never transmitted any of this alleged knowledge to us.

2. 7. Sixty Martyrs of Gaza (d. 638)

The appearance and production of martyrological texts during that period is strongly connected with the crucial issue of conversion and apostasy.²⁹⁰ Although for the first two or three centuries of Islamic history, the conquered people could participate in the administration of the Caliphate regardless of their religious persuasions. Their entrance to the society of the ruling elite of the conquerors had to follow a special process, apart from their conversion; they should become a client (*mawlā*) of a certain Arab. This mixture of Islamisation and Arabisation represents one of the most distinctive features of the evolution of Islamic culture. The discussion about the reasons and causes, as well as the relevance of practical factors (such as taxation or social and political status) for conversions, is an extremely complicated and definitely not one-dimensional topic. This issue becomes even more complex when the question of what Islam (and consequently converting to it) could have meant, for both the conquered and the conquerors of that time, is brought into the discussion. On the other hand, the contribution of the conquered populations is another decisive factor for the development of Islam, both by their interaction with the conquerors, as well as by their conversion. It seems that the second half of the eighth century was a crucial point, because apostasy and conversion escalated in great numbers and all the religious communities of the Near East had to face the consequences of such a development. Finally, it has to be stressed that once conversion to Islam took place, there could be no

²⁸⁹ Referred by Theophanes and Eutychios.

²⁹⁰ On the issue of apostasy and conversion, see: Gervers, Michael & Bikhazi, Ramzi Jibran (eds) *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 1990; Arnold, Dennett, Welhausen, Lapidus, Bulliet, Morony, Levtzion, Gervers.

backsliding, since the penalty was usually death (although exile was another, but rare, option).²⁹¹

In relation to apostasy and conversion, certain martyrological texts soon began to appear, describing the trials that the Christians suffered at the hands of the Muslims. The earliest such text describes the martyrdom of the Byzantine garrison in the city of Gaza during the conquest of the city. Although preserved in Latin, it definitely derives from a Greek original, as several of the expressions found in it clearly show.²⁹² According to this text, the siege and capitulation of Gaza, which occurred between 636 and 637,²⁹³ was followed by the capture and imprisonment of the soldiers of the garrison. “It happened at that time regarding the godless Saracens that they besieged the Christ-beloved city of Gaza and, driven by necessity, the citizens sought a treaty. This was done. The Saracens indeed gave to them a pledge, except to the soldiers who were captured in that city. Rather, marching into the city and seizing the most Christian soldiers, they put them in prison. On the next day ‘Amr (*Ambrus*) ordered the Christ-holy soldiers to be presented. Once brought before him, he constrained them to desist from the confession of Christ and from the precious and life-giving cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Since they would not consent, ‘Amr ordered their wives, children and weapons to be separated from them, and again to put them in prison.”²⁹⁴ After being transferred from city to city (Eleutheropolis, “Theropolis,” and Jerusalem) for more than a year, and being supported in their decision to accept martyrdom by the patriarch Sophronius, ten of them were beheaded outside Jerusalem, while the remaining fifty were sent back to Eleutheropolis where they rejected the last chance given to them to reject Christ, which then resulted in them being killed.

Hoyland has strongly criticised the credibility of this text, based on its narrative inconsistencies, as well as on its omission to mention ‘Amr’s identity, and on Sophronius’ involvement in it, due to inconsistencies in its chronological evidence. His scepticism is further enhanced by the fact that

²⁹¹ See Heffening’s art. “Murttadd” in *EF*². As is also referred to, in Elias of Damascus’ *Pasion*, the caliph Maḥdī decreed that the converts to Islam, who returned to their previous faith should be put to death, Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 343; n. 27.

²⁹² See Delhaye’s view in *Passio*.

²⁹³ For the problem of dates, see Guillou.

²⁹⁴ *Passio*, (trans. by Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 348).

there is no other reference, either Roman or Byzantine, to a garrison in Gaza. Although, he accepts that “a kernel of truth may well lie behind the text”, he asserts that its reworking and crude translation “has obscured it beyond recognition.”²⁹⁵ Kaegi, on the other hand, without suggesting its completely uncritical acceptance, claimed that “its essential details are plausible.” Rejecting Hoyland’s scepticism as “unjustifiable,” he offers quite persuasive arguments for the text’s credibility, adduced from the correct names of specific military units found in Byzantine sources (*Scythae Iustiniani*), as well as the proper use of the term *bandum* for a military unit, “and above all a documented specific *bandum*, which no tenth-century copyist or writer could have discovered or interpolated in the tenth or eleventh century.”²⁹⁶ However, he does not deal with Hoyland’s criticism about ‘Amr and Sophronius. Although Woods, in his recently published study,²⁹⁷ makes some interesting remarks concerning the credibility of the text, he claims unpersuasively, that Sophronius died as a martyr, something that —due to Sophronius’ importance— would have not escaped the attention of the Byzantine Church, which had never treated him as martyr, although it had always him honoured as a saint.²⁹⁸

The significance, however, of the martyrological texts, as Hoyland says, lies in their efficiency to produce models for the Christians and on their use as propaganda against the Muslims. Despite the fact that conversion (and martyrological texts) was to grow impressively a century later, its presence in this text, which seems to be historical in its core, might point to the growing fear and increasing awareness of the Christians towards the convictions and actions of the Arabs, to which an adamant loyalty to the Christian faith is the due response.

²⁹⁵ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 351.

²⁹⁶ Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 253, n.51.

²⁹⁷ Woods, David “The 60 Martyrs of Gaza and the Martyrdom of Bishop Sophronius of Jerusalem,” *ARAM* 15 (2003), 129-150.

²⁹⁸ Cf. Sahas, Daniel J. “The Face to Face Encounter between Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem and the Caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb: Friends or Foes?” in Grypeou, Emmanouela, Swanson, Mark & Thomas, David (eds) *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, Leiden-Boston 2006, 33-44.

2. 8. Anastasius Sinaïte (d. ca. 700)²⁹⁹

Anastasius the Sinaïte, whose life almost extends for the whole of the seventh century, was born at the beginning of that century in Amathus, Cyprus. Although his works have been qualified as “a key source for the history of seventh-century East Mediterranean society and belief,”³⁰⁰ quite paradoxically little is known about his biographical data; and whatever is known derives mainly from his works.³⁰¹ He probably left his hometown when the first Arab invasions broke out on the island in 649, going to the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, where he became a monk, under the spiritual leadership of the famous ascetic and writer John Climacus. He eventually left and started travelling around the major Christian centres of the Near East before finally, around 680 returning to the monastery of Mount Sinai, where for the next twenty years he passed on the knowledge and experience he had gained, as well as his theological views. He was a staunch defender of Chalcedonian orthodoxy and an opponent of Monophysitism, against which he taught during his travels in the Near East.³⁰²

In his work *Odegos* (Guide) —better known by its Latin title *Viae Dux*— his main aim is to refute Monophysitism and demonstrate the right (orthodox) way of life. He also mentions the Arabs in close connection with his principal objective, i.e. the refutation of Monophysitism. *Viae Dux* seems to be a compilation of earlier works and its dating was debated by scholars, until 2001 when André Binggeli proved that it was written ca. 680, fifty years later than most of the scholars believed.³⁰³ In the introductory part of this work,

²⁹⁹ His works are edited by Uthemann, *Viae Dux*; Richard and Munitiz, *Quaestiones et Responsiones*; PG 89; and Nau, François “Le texte grec des récits utiles à l’âme d’Anastase (le Sinaïte),” *OC* 3 (1903), 56-90.

³⁰⁰ See Haldon, John “The Works of Anastasius of Sinai: A Key-Source for the History of Seventh-Century East Mediterranean Society and Belief” in Cameron, Averil & Conrad, Lawrence (eds) *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East I: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, Princeton 1992, 107-147.

³⁰¹ For these biographical details and their provenance, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 92-93.

³⁰² See Griffith, H. Sidney “Anastasios of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims,” *GOTR* 32 (1987), 342.

³⁰³ See Richard, Marcel “Anastasius the Sinaïte, l’Hodegos et le Monothélisme,” *REB* 16 (1958), 29-42, where he criticises the views of Maspero for an earlier date (630); Uthemann’s introduction in Uthemann, Karl-Heinz *Anastasii Sinaitae Viae Dux*, CCSG 8, Turnhout 1981; Griffith, “Anastasios of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims;” it seems that Hoyland’s suggestion for 690 was closer to the certified one. Binggeli, André *Anastase le Sinaïte: Récits sur le Sinai et Récits utiles à l’âme*, Edition, traduction, commentaire, Thèse, Paris 2001, 341-344.

where he explains the reason for writing that book, he says: “Before any discussion, we must anathematise all the false notions that our opponent might entertain about us, as when we want to debate with the Arabs we have first to anathematise anyone who says two gods, or anyone who says God has carnally begotten a son, or anyone who worships as God any created thing whatever, in heaven or in earth.”³⁰⁴ Interestingly enough, Anastasius, later in his work connects Severus, the Monophysite theologian, with the Arabs: “Severus has been a good pupil to the masters of the Jews, the Greeks, and the Arabs, in part accepting the holy scriptures, while rejecting a part of them, just as the pupils of Manichaens do.”³⁰⁵ Quite clearly in this statement, the Arabs have been included in the ever-expanding list of heretics and deviators of faith, and their denomination is mostly engaged with their religious persuasions and not with their ethnic-geographical origin, as had been used until then.³⁰⁶ Later, when referring to a debate that he participated in at Alexandria with some Monophysites, he says that the Severans “when they hear of ‘natures,’ they think of shameful and outrageous things, the sexual organs of the bodies of men and women. Because of this they refrain from such a word, as if they were pupils of the Saracens. For when these people hear of the birth of God and of His genesis, thinking of marriage, immediately blaspheme speaking of insemination and carnal union.”³⁰⁷ Connecting these debates with heretics, Anastasius, in his *Quaestiones et Responsiones* (for which see below), suggests that when this debate is “with Jews, Hellenes or Arabs the discourse of the Church and the confession of faith and Christ should be differentiated” from that used for other Christian heresies.³⁰⁸ In these two passages, Anastasius implies that by the end of the seventh century both Arabs and Christians were engaged in dialogues about issues of faith and doctrine. This fact, with all probability, might have offered the chance for both parts of interlocutors to obtain a better knowledge of the other, as well as

³⁰⁴ *Viae Dux*, I.1, 9 (the references follow Uthemann’s critical edition mentioned above n. 150).

³⁰⁵ *Viae Dux*, VII.2, 116-120.

³⁰⁶ Cf. Griffith, “Anastasios of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims.”

³⁰⁷ *Viae Dux*, X.2.

³⁰⁸ *Quaest.* 39 (20), Appendix (the references are taken from the critical edition: Richard, Marcel & Munitiz, Joseph A. (eds) *Quaestiones et Responsiones*, CCSG 59, Turnhout 2006).

of the ways that dialectical theology might have been exercised, as Cook underlines.³⁰⁹

The above-mentioned references while echoing well-known Muslim beliefs about God, also reveal an awareness of the basic Muslim objections to Christian doctrine: the denial of Jesus' sonship and divinity, as well as the refutation of the idea that God might beget offspring. Although, as Griffith comments, these ideas can be expressed in the Qur'ān,³¹⁰ it can be inferred from Anastasius' reports that they have been well developed and widely spread, as well as being distinctively recognisable as Islamic, by the end of the seventh century. The inscription on the Dome of the Rock by 'Abd al-Malik in the same period, testifies to the pre-eminence of these beliefs as the main dividing line between the religious conceptions of the conquered populations and the conquerors' ruling class. Furthermore and more significantly, as Hoyland notes, Anastasius' knowledge indicates a familiarity with the very literal way that the Arabs understood Christ's humanity; a familiarity, which could only have been obtained through real contacts and discussions with Muslims.³¹¹ The connection of Arab religious ideas with Severan-Monophysite teaching does not serve as an explanation of the origins of those doctrines, but instead it points to the ascription of the Arabs in the common list of heretics (as the distorted sequence of names indicates). This reaction is accompanied by the accusation that they have a selective belief in the Scriptures (a charge commonly addressed to the heretics), which was also to become a standard feature for Arabs during that time.³¹²

Anastasius is one of the first Christian writers to refer to certain aspects of the conquerors' religious beliefs; most significantly he is among the first to refer to the Christological aspects of Islamic theology (denial of Christ's

³⁰⁹ See Cook, Michael "The Origins of 'Kalam'," *BSOAS* 43 (1980), 146-147, where he also suggests that Anastasius' discussions on free will and determinism might have influenced the relevant discussions in the Muslim side, and might have helped the development of the kalām.

³¹⁰ See Griffith, "Anastasios of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims," passim. Although Griffith does not support the idea of an already written Quran but suggests that it is due to its reciting and teaching that such ideas became widespread.

³¹¹ See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 94.

³¹² Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 95; Griffith, "Anastasios of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims," 350; and Richard, Marcel "Anastasius the Sinaïte," 35-36, where there is a discussion of this issue.

divinity)³¹³ and he points to an alleged connection between the evolution of Muslim Christology and the Monophysite views of Severus of Antioch (as a reaction against it).³¹⁴ Of great importance for the evolution of early Muslim dogma is also his reference to the issue of predestination and free will, as Haldon has already suggested.³¹⁵

It is worth noting here that Michael Cook, when discussing Jacob of Edessa's and John of Damascus' views, postulates a date after the beginnings of the eighth century for the start of this controversy.³¹⁶ He seems to ignore Anastasius' outright and affirmative witness that the Arabs of his time discussed predestination and free will although he accepts that "*Qadarism* shows various plausible traces of Christian influence;"³¹⁷ but with all probability, this negligence has to do with the late appearance of the critical edition of the text of *Q&R*. In any case, I think that Anastasius' testimony indicates a much earlier date and, thus, calls for a re-examination of this issue. "Some who have apostatised from God and the holy Church with this nation [sc. Arabs] say that whom God wants to save he is saved, and whom God leads into perdition he is perished ... I believe, and I think that God also agrees [with that], that even Satan himself will not dare to say that God saves whoever he wishes and leaves into perdition whoever he wishes, but as the demons are more pious than the Arabs concerning the beliefs on Christ, confessing him as God's son, likewise it happens about this creed." The fact that the *Quaestio* 99 ascribes³¹⁸ this discussion to Christians, who abandoned their faith to follow the Arabs, attests to Anastasius' importance for the knowledge of the historical frame and the illumination of interactions between the populations of the Middle East.

³¹³ *Viae Dux* I.1, 9; X.2, 169-170; *Quaest.* 99,156.

³¹⁴ *Viae Dux* X.2, 169-170. Cf. Griffith, "Anastasios of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims," who connects it to the knowledge of the Quranic message; and Haldon, John "The Works of Anastasius of Sinai," 115; Kennedy also alludes to such a connection.

³¹⁵ Haldon, "The Works of Anastasius of Sinai," 146.

³¹⁶ See Cook, Michael *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source-Critical Study*, Cambridge 1981, 147.

³¹⁷ In addition to the traces pointed out by Becker and accepted by Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, 156.

³¹⁸ *Quaest.* 99,156. It is interesting to note here that the discussion about the limit of life, found in Jacob's of Edessa tenth epistle, which is discussed by Cook and from that he infers that during that period there has not started yet a discussion about predestination, is also found in Anastasius *Q&R*, 16, 23-24 of Richard's critical edition (88 in Migne's *PG*) in addition to his afore-mentioned testimony about contemporary discussions between Christians and Muslims about predestination and free will.

Anastasius also composed a work on the style of the collections of questions and answers. The main difficulty that this genre presents is that writers and copyists, more often than not, take pieces of one work and put them into another, thus making the identification, the dating, as well as the ascription of a work to a certain writer, highly problematic, if not impossible in many cases.³¹⁹ Besides such difficulties, Anastasius' *Quaestiones*, which, in the preserved manuscripts, are strongly related to *Quaestiones ad Antiochum Dux*, call for clarification of this relationship.³²⁰ Hoyland persuasively argues for a date of composition in late seventh century. Inside this work then, each question has a corresponding answer, which derives from a wide range of textual references, from Deuteronomy to the New Testament to Maximus Confessor, "the response thus taking the form of a florilegium,"³²¹ but revealing actually its provenance, at least partially, as also being from a florilegium.³²² Although the matters discussed in it are diverse, they mainly revolve around practical questions about religious life (exegetical issues of biblical texts, sacramental life, avoidance of heresy) while there are also some questions of a medical-natural science character. What makes this work valuable, as a source about the real conditions and the pragmatic terms of life in that period, is Anastasius' attempt to deal with the dilemmas caused by the new situation that the conquests brought about in a distinctively pragmatic, compassionate and sympathetic way, far from formalistic and ritualistic approaches, as well as the mention of these dilemmas.³²³

The questions are indicative of the situation that the Christian population faced at that time under the Arabs and of their worrying concerns too: "Are all the evils that the Arabs have perpetrated upon the land and the Christian populations always a result of God's will or permission? How can one redeem one's sins if, having been reduced to servitude or captured in war, one can no longer attend church, fast or observe a vigil freely and at will?" To which he

³¹⁹ Bibliography; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 95.

³²⁰ See analysis in Richard's introduction to *Quaestiones*, where Richard avoids to elucidate the exact relation of the two texts; Haldon, "The works of Anastasius of Sinai," and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 95-97.

³²¹ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 97-98.

³²² See Cameron, "Texts as Weapons" about the flourishing of textual witnesses (florilegia) during the seventh century and their use as references for the purposes of polemics.

³²³ For an extensive analysis see Haldon, "The works of Anastasius of Sinai."

replies that humility and faith will help him redeem his sins. “What can someone say about the Christian women who, as slaves and captives, have given themselves up to prostitution?” The answer is that it depends whether they have done so out of hunger and need or from unchastity and pleasure.³²⁴ He feels great sadness for the present generation because “we see our brothers and fellow Christians and our children pressed by great need into hunger and thirst, and nakedness, toils and labours.” The oppressors that impose such hard conditions upon the Christians are the Arabs, to whom only some brief references are made: “We again accuse the Jews and the Arabs of not having the Holy Spirit; because none of them ever during his prayer burst into tears for his sins.”³²⁵ There is also an interesting acknowledgement that ideas such as that, claiming that “Satan fell on account of not bowing down to Adam,” belong to “the myths of the Hellenes and the Arabs.”³²⁶ Finally, he hints at the Arabs’ favouritism towards the heretics, when, answering to a hypothetical heretic why the holy land is in the hands of the orthodox, he says that “the tribal leaders of the Arabs like you, the heretics, more than us, the orthodox.”³²⁷ It is hard to distinguish, however, if this statement reflects the real preference and closer connection of the Arabs towards the heretics, or simply Anastasius’ grievance about the change of politico-social situation. This dilemma exists as after the conquests, the Chalcedonian Christians found themselves having equal status with the rest of the (heretic) Christians, thus losing their previous pre-eminent socio-political position due to their allegiance to Byzantine rule.

However, another aspect of real life also appears to have occupied Anastasius’ thoughts and mind: the threat of apostasy from the Church and the adherence to the religion of the conquerors. The story of a certain Moses from Clysma,³²⁸ who has passed several times between Christianity and Islam is suggestive of how permeable and psychologically fluid the inter-confessional and doctrinal barriers were for the population. Still, apart from prayer in the mosque, there is no other indication about what conversion could have meant

³²⁴ Quaest. 76.

³²⁵ Quaest. 49.

³²⁶ Quaest. 80. Of course this reference has nothing to do with the Greek mythology. It seems that Anastasius, connecting the Arabs to the Greeks’ myths, hints to the formers’ paganism.

³²⁷ Quaest. 39 (20) Appendix.

³²⁸ Narrat., C5.

in terms of religious beliefs or practice.³²⁹ This concern of apostasy pervades Anastasius' collections of edifying tales,³³⁰ and particularly the second one entitled "Encouraging and supportive tales of the most humble monk Anastasius, which occurred in various places in our times." Anastasius makes it clear from the beginning that he has collected certain tales which "concern the faith of Christians and which will bring great comfort to our captive brothers and to all that listen or read with faith." The theme of prisoners runs through this collection and there are many references to the hardships that the Christian prisoners of war suffer. One specific example is the story of the martyrdom of George the Black, who apostatised at his childhood and reconverted to Christianity, but when betrayed by one of his fellow captives, he refused to reject Christianity and was slain by his master's sword. The account of George's martyrdom is a plain and discrete one, indicating that Anastasius does not suggest martyrdom as a way of resistance against the Muslims, although he does accept it for those decided taking this path. (When questioned if someone commits a sin by departing in an era of persecutions, he answers that if the persecution is helping someone to lose his soul, he has to test himself about his faith and act accordingly but if the persecution results in corporeal damages, we have to endure for the sake of Christ).³³¹ In the same narrative the name given for the prayer place of the Arabs is *masgidha*.³³² However, the significant point he makes in these stories is the connection of the Saracens with the demons; the Saracens are the demons' friends, they are even worse than the demons.³³³ Through several stories he reveals, and makes clear, the connection of the Saracens with the demons; he even transmits 'information' from some Christian sailors who were transferred as slaves to the place where the Saracens "have their stone and their cult" (Mecca?), and who witnessed a horrible female demon emerging from the depths of the earth to collect the offerings from the sacrifices of the

³²⁹ See below the narrative about George the Black.

³³⁰ Of which unfortunately, there is no critical edition yet. For the descriptions here see Nau, François "Le texte grec des récits utiles à l'âme d'Anastase (le Sinaïte)," *OC* 3 (1903), 56-90; and Flusin, Bernard M. "Démon et Sarrasins. L'auteur et le propos des *Diègèmata stèrìktika* d'Anastase le Sinaïte," *TM* 11 (1991), 380-409.

³³¹ *Quaest.* 75.

³³² See Flusin, "Démon et Sarrasins," 387 (Récit C 13).

³³³ See Flusin, "Démon et Sarrasins."

Muslims. Demons collaborate with Saracens everywhere, they accompany the Arab army on its expedition to Constantinople, they even participate in the clearing work on the Temple Mount, as Anastasius himself witnessed one night in 660, and clarified to his readers that the building under construction was not the Temple of God.³³⁴ More significantly, the demons, when interrogated, confess that what they fear most from Christians is the cross, baptism and the Eucharist. And when they are asked which faith, from the existing faiths on the world, they prefer, they reply: “That of our companions ... those who do not have any of the three things of which we have spoken and those who do not confess the son of Mary to be God or son of God.”³³⁵

As Flusin ingeniously points out, for Anastasius’ contemporaries there are not many religions in the world that worship numerous gods, but many faiths in God (*Theou pistis*), i.e. other ways to believe in the same God and worship Him, although for Anastasius “there is no other faith in God apart from that of the Christians.”³³⁶ Anastasius, detached from expectations of imperial victory and faraway from the influence of the distant Byzantine power, tries to accept the new situation and also help his fellow Christians do the same, by encouraging them to keep their faith in God alive and to endure the hardships they suffer. Implicitly he realises that the Arabs are here to stay, and the suggestion he has to offer his contemporary Christian community in order to successfully face the alliance of the Saracens and demons, is to stay around the Eucharist and the sacramental life of the Church and its priests, and to remain faithful and steadfast to the faith and practices which the demons are afraid of and Saracens fight against.

2. 9. Miracles of St. George

³³⁴ See Flusin, Bernard M. “Les premières constructions musulmanes sur l’Esplanade du Temple selon deux ‘récits édifiants’ byzantins,” *REG* 101 (1988), 24-26 (Communications); Flusin, Bernard M. “L’esplanade du Temple à l’arrivée des arabes d’après deux récits byzantins” in Raby, Julian & Johns, Jeremy (eds) *Bayt al-Maqdis: Abd al-Malik’s Jerusalem*, Part I, Oxford 1993, 17-31 (Greek text: 25).

³³⁵ Trans. by Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 101.

³³⁶ Flusin, “Démones et Sarrasins,” 408.

Collections of miracles initiate from a distinct feature of Late Antiquity: the emergence of the holy man as the mediator between heaven and earth. This extremely important development in Early Christianity was connected with the figure of a saint, and especially of a martyr, whose prayers and superpowers (miracles) can connect the divine with the corporeal.³³⁷ The intermediary powers of the saints, between God and humans, were deposited and enshrined after their death, in their place of martyrdom, along with their relics, and their icons. During the seventh century, collections of miracles performed by saints abound: of Artemius in Constantinople, of Cyrus and John in Alexandria, of Anastasius the Persian, and of Demetrius in Thessalonica. Although a full collection of miracles attributed to St. George at Diospolis (Lydda/Ramla) appears in the sixteenth century,³³⁸ the miracles described there start occurring from the period of Byzantine rule in Palestine, while several others involve the Arabs and most probably belong to the ninth or tenth century. However, one of them in particular seems to indicate an origin from the conquest period, due to its mention of the fact that the Saracens had “taken prisoners all whom they encountered.”³³⁹ This account describes how some Saracens, who were encamped at Diospolis, got drunk and noisy. They then decided to eat inside the church of St. George and despite the warnings of one of their prisoners about St. George’s powers, one of them threw his lance at the saint’s icon. The lance miraculously reversed and pierced the Saracen’s heart while many of his companions were struck down.³⁴⁰ As Hoyland points out, stories of such instances were commonly used between sixth and ninth centuries in the context of Iconoclasm, mainly aiming to demonstrate the efficacy of the icons and to rebuff iconoclasts.³⁴¹

In general, the collections available do not seem to offer material firm and worthy of investigation and reflection about Byzantine attitudes towards the Muslims. What they might reveal though, is the necessity for a show of strength and an exhibition of the power of orthodoxy and its heroes, i.e. the saints, through factual documents, so as the believers can remain steadfast to

³³⁷ See Peter Brown’s study of the phenomenon, *The Cult of Saints*, Chicago 1981.

³³⁸ Aufhauser, Johann B. (ed.) *Miracula S. Georgii*, Leipzig 1913.

³³⁹ See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 91.

³⁴⁰ Aufhauser, *Miracula S. Georgii*, no. 2

³⁴¹ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 91.

their faith and assured of the superiority of Christianity. From this point of view, their relative importance might draw from their suggestive expressions of (more) popular attitudes and reactions; in other words, the miracles' narrations might meet the need of the populations for consolation from hardships and for reassurance of the superiority of their —tested— faith.

2. 10. Greek Papyri³⁴²

The information extracted until recently from the corpus of several, both Greek and bilingual (Arabic-Greek), papyri is very limited, concerning attitudes towards the newcomers, mainly due to the nature of these papyri. The vast majority of them are administrative texts from the Umayyad era in Egypt, thus they actually deal with issues concerning logistics, taxation, and similar administrative concerns. Needless to say, that because of their character as administrative texts of the conquerors' ruling elite, these papyri can by no means be considered Byzantine sources reflecting Byzantine attitudes, though their inclusion here seems necessary for the following reasons. Firstly, because they present some information that the conquerors explicitly state about themselves. The fact that these pieces of information come from such texts attests to their value, because the self-image of the conquerors is reflected in these texts, which were intended for internal use and purposes. Secondly, as previously stated, the administrative staff of the Umayyad Caliphate mainly consisted of —if not exclusively— members of the ex-Byzantine ruling elite, i.e. Melkite Christians, and Greek was the language of the administration until the early eighth century. From this point of view, we are indirectly informed about the first-hand knowledge that at least certain members of the Christian population had about their new masters. And in part, it is upon this amount of knowledge, which was slowly transmitted to the rest of the population, that the ideas, conceptions and

³⁴² This information is mainly adduced from the following papyri corpora: Bell, Harold Idris & others (eds) *Greek Papyri in the British Museum*, v. 1-7, British Museum, London 1893-19[74]; Fantoni, Georgia (ed.) *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri, Griechische Texte. X: Greek papyri of the Byzantine period*, Wien 1989; and Morelli, Federico (ed.) *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri, Griechische Texte XV: documenti greci per la fiscalità e la amministrazione dell'Egitto arabo*, Wien 2001.

attitudes of the local population towards the newcomers were gradually formed and developed.

What can be inferred then from the papyri of the second half of the seventh century is as follows: the Arab settlers of full blood, as Bell comments,³⁴³ are referred to as *moagaritai/magaritai*, which is a Greek rendering of the Arabic *muhājirūn*, whereas those who had converted from the occupied territories (*mawālī*) are referred to as *mauleis/mauloi*. The congregation and prayer place of the conquerors is the *masgidha* (the Arabic *masjid*). There is also the mention of *amīr al-mu'minīn*. Another feature appearing in the papyri is that the new Arabic date (Hijra) is referred to as *etos kat' Arabas* (year according to the Arabs). What is interesting, according to Meimaris, is that in the area of Palestine “the forms Hijriya, lil hijra an-Nabouiya, min al-hijra as-Sarifa, min al hijra etc. are to be met approximately 200 years after the establishment of the hijra Islamic Era [622] and in a very rare manner.”³⁴⁴ In the inscriptions and papyri written in Greek, the reference to the calendar is *kat' Arabas*/according to the Arabs, while in those written in Arabic it is under the word *sanat*, the year. The introductory formula they quite often use is the *basmala* while *shahāda* features after 698-733.³⁴⁵

2. 11. Conclusions

“With hindsight we tend to see the arrival of the Arabs and the formation of Islam as taking precedence over all other contemporary issues, but that is to distort the situation.”
(Averil Cameron)³⁴⁶

³⁴³ Bell, *Greek Papyri in the British Museum*, v. 4, xxxiv.

³⁴⁴ See Meimaris, Yiannis “The Arab (Hijra) Era mentioned in Greek Inscriptions and Papyri from Palestine,” *Graeco-Arabica* 3 (1984), 184. Cf. also Crone & Cook, *Hagarism*, 160, n. 56: “No seventh-century source identifies the Arab era as that of the *hijra*.”

³⁴⁵ According to Cavallo, G. & Maehler, H. *Greek Bookhands of the Early Byzantine Period. A.D. 300-800* (Institute of Classical Studies, Bulletin Supplement 47, London 1987). Although, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 112, for possible exceptions.

³⁴⁶ Cameron, “The Eastern Provinces in the Seventh Century,” 312.

As previously stated, the Byzantine sources examined present two features, whose importance for the ensuing analysis will soon make itself apparent. Although in broad terms they are Byzantine witnesses, they derive from persons residing in the recently occupied territories of the Near East and not from the imperial centre of the empire, i.e. Constantinople; actually there are no reports at all for the historical events of that time from the capital itself.³⁴⁷ Additionally, most of them are penned by ecclesiastic figures and quite interestingly represent incidental references to our topic, since they are found dispersed in secondary works of the whole body of their theological corpus. The answers that follow will try to respond to the main questions raised at the beginning of this chapter.

Before continuing with a discussion on the answers adduced from the Byzantine sources surveyed, it is worth presenting a brief summary of their testimonies about Arabs/Muslims. Thus, the afore-mentioned sources (broadly from the mid-630s to c. 690s) inform us that the Arabs invaded the Byzantine territories of Palestine and Syria, defeating the Byzantine army, and conquered most of them; they destroyed cities and the countryside, and pillaged religious institutions, they killed people and took others prisoner. Explicitly (the *Doctrina*) or implicitly (Maximus and Sophronius) it is stated that Arabs were accompanied or supported by certain Jews. Apart from the havoc and shock they caused the Christian populations of the Near East to suffer, the latter soon came to realise that the invaders were there to stay. As revealed in the papyri of Egypt, the conquerors developed organisational and administrative skills regarding their government of the occupied territories, as well as the sustenance of their army, by demanding provisions from the local population. The invading Arabs called themselves by the —unknown until then— name *muhajirun* (*moagaritai*), which is only found in the papyri, and not in early Byzantine sources. They also had in use a new calendar in order to date the years “according to the Arabs” (*kat’ Arabas*), without any further mention about its provenance. The leader of their community was called *amīr*

³⁴⁷ Cf. Gero, S. “Early Contacts Between Byzantium and the Arab Empire: A Review and some Reconsiderations” in Bakhit, Muhammad Adnan (ed.) *Proceedings of the Second Symposium on the History of Bilād al-Shām during the Early Islamic Period up to 40 A.H./640 A.D., The Fourth International Conference on the History of Bilad al-Sham*, Amman, I (1987), 126.

al-mu'minīn (*amiralmoumnin*), thus implying that they represented themselves as a community of believers. It soon became clear that they held some specific religious beliefs and practices. Their faith was strictly monotheistic (Anastasius) and they followed the Arab prophet (*Doctrina*); they had a sanctuary at which they offered sacrifices and they revered a stone (Anastasius); they were hostile to the cross (Sophronius, Anastasius) and denied that Christ was the son of God (Anastasius, and possibly Sophronius); and they greatly revered the city of Jerusalem (Anastasius). Finally, they prayed in distinct places called *masjid* (*masgidha* by Anastasius of Sinai and the papyri).

The initial information that we get concerns the invasions of the Arabs in the Near East and expresses well-tested attitudes of the Late Antique world towards the Arab nomads. The initial understanding of the invading Arabs is expressed through the employment of the pre-Islamic preconceptions and stereotypes described in the previous chapter. In particular, the image of the barbaric, lawless, and uncivilised nomads who invaded the civilised *oikoumene* is predominant in most of the sources. Maximus' rhetorical vocabulary embodies all the well-known preconceptions and prejudices against the Arabs; they are barbarian desert-dwellers, they do not even belong to the human race (being wild beasts whose form alone is human), who dare to break the boundaries of the civilised world, and penetrate the civilised Roman *politeia* in order to ravage it. Regardless of its aggressiveness, his rhetoric does not point to something more serious than the usual raids from the Arabs of the desert, and does not convey any information about the meaning of the invasions; he even refrains from mentioning the name of the invaders. The only significantly novel idea he adds is the allusion of the collaboration of the Jews with the invaders against the Christian populations. I think that such allusions and allegations, concerning the Jewish participation in the Arab invasions (as found in *Doctrina* and Maximus), should not be dismissed as mere Christian biases, since the Jewish messianic expectations of that period had also political parameters and implications: "Jews in the Near East looked forward to divine intervention and messianic salvation, and for them, significantly, messianism thoroughly folded a political dimension into the religious. In Late Antique Judaism, the Messiah was an explicitly political

figure.”³⁴⁸ The parameters concerning the Jewish involvement in the Christian polemic against Islam will be discussed in the Appendix. However, I am tempted here to make the tentative suggestion that the alleged (explicitly or implicitly) association of the Jews with the invading Arabs may have initially helped the formation of the religiously inimical image of the Muslim. This connection might have strongly predisposed the Christians to interpret the Arabs’ beliefs and customs as having been influenced by the Jews.

Sophronius’ *Christmas Sermon* follows the same set of concepts, presenting the Saracens as barbarians who attacked Bethlehem in one of their usual raids against Christian territories. But a couple of years later, in his *Sermon on the Holy Baptism*, Sophronius alerts his flock to the appearance and beliefs of the Saracens towards the cross and Jesus. The ethnic group of Saracens, apart from its well-known characteristics, now seems to be presented with certain and distinct (blasphemous) religious beliefs against the cross and Jesus; although they are referred as pagans (*ethnikois tois stomasi*), we cannot fail to notice an increasing awareness about their arrogantly expressed religious beliefs.

Both Maximus and Sophronius resort to the familiar scheme ‘sin-punishment (defeat)-repentance (victory)’ in order to comprehend and interpret the contemporary events of that era. This exegetical scheme, which comes almost spontaneously from the mouth and pen of the two theologians, was incorporated into the Christian theology by the Old Testament conceptions of the punishment of God’s chosen people due to their sins against him. Punishment was considered to be the result of sin but also a revelation of God, who clearly proved he cared about his creature calling it by these edifying means to repentance and reconciliation. The deliverance of the chosen people to enemies and wars, and the sufferings they had to endure under their enemies, was a typical example of the punishment that God inflicted upon his nation due to their sinful behaviour. It should also not be forgotten that the enemies —till the time of their defeat— are allowed to prevail, because they allegedly punish on behalf of God, and, unintentionally,

³⁴⁸ Berkey, *The Formation of Islam*, 52.

they instruct God's chosen nation who was led astray.³⁴⁹ This comes as a consequence of Byzantines' adoption of the Old Testament's features (considering themselves as the New Israel, the new Chosen people of God). As a result, the reason behind the military success of the Saracens, and the infliction of such calamities upon the Christian population are to be found in the sins committed by the Christians. "But the amount of our sins has allowed all these to happen",³⁵⁰ "due to our innumerable sins and grave faults"³⁵¹ ... "we are responsible for all these [calamities] and there is not a word for defence."³⁵² The optimistic solution to the drama will come when the sinner repents; an act that will cure the divine wrath, heal the wounds of the sinner, and restore the faithful again to their previous status. "If we pray and stay vigilant"³⁵³ ... "if we accomplish God's will and have the true faith"³⁵⁴ ... "by repenting we will be redeemed from such attrition of calamities ... it has not been appointed upon us another hope for deliverance."³⁵⁵ The Arabs are not considered *per se*, but through the spectrum of the relationship between God and his beloved people; they are simply seen as an instrument of God's wrath, and divine chastisement. It goes without saying, that the self-referential character of this scheme very rarely allows some space for the transmission of real knowledge about the Saracens or understanding of their actions, beliefs and purposes; most of what is transferred is coloured through the sufferings of the Christian population.³⁵⁶

³⁴⁹ See *Vocabulaire de Théologie Biblique*, art. Ennemi, punishment. There is an abundance of biblical citations on this topic, of which most characteristic: "*the nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile due to their iniquity, for they were unfaithful to me. So I hid my face from them and handed them over to their enemies ...*," Ez 39, 23; and "*Be courageous, my people! You are the ones who preserve the name of Israel! It was not for your destruction that you were sold to the nations. You were delivered over to your adversaries because you had stirred God to anger. For you provoked your creator.*," Bar 4, 5-7. But see also about the imminent destruction of the enemies: "*O daughter of the Babylonians! ... I was angry at my people; I defiled my special possession and handed them over to you. You showed them no mercy; Disaster will overtake you; you will not know how to harm it away. Destruction will fall on you; you will not be able to appease it. Calamity will strike you suddenly, before you recognize it!*," Is 47, 5-6, 11. (following NET Bible translation).

³⁵⁰ PG 91, 541C.

³⁵¹ Usener, 506, 27-28.

³⁵² Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Holy Baptism*, 167, 12-13.

³⁵³ PG 91, 541D.

³⁵⁴ Usener, 508, 28-29.

³⁵⁵ Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Holy Baptism*, 167.

³⁵⁶ For the Arabs as the tool of God's chastisement, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 524-526, Gero, "Early Contacts," 126.

Sophronius' testimony comes from around 637 (the latest). We have to wait for almost fifty years, until the next Byzantine witness appears and provides us with some reference to the Arabs and their beliefs, in the form of Anastasius of Sinai's writings. Sophronius prefers the well-known expressions Saracens, Ishmaelites and Hagarenes, derived mostly from the religious field, while Anastasius prefers almost exclusively the more neutral term Arabs, which carries geographic-cultural implications. Anastasius' world is quite different from his predecessors': due to the Arab conquests and the ensuing rule of the newcomers, the orthodox population now constitute just one of the several religious minorities in the transformed Middle-Eastern socio-political landscape. The privileged status that the Chalcedonian adherents in the Middle East enjoyed had long gone, together with its guarantor, the Byzantine administration. Anastasius' consuming concern was the spiritual guidance and support of the Chalcedonian communities of Egypt and Syria and the fight against Monophysitism and Monotheletism.³⁵⁷ In his collections of edifying tales, he presents the realities and the hardships of everyday life that the erstwhile privileged Christians had to endure under Arab rule; while offering his solace and spiritual comfort, especially to those in captivity, he attempts to answer the pressing and worrying questions that the new conditions imposed upon the worrying Christians.³⁵⁸

Although Anastasius vaguely refers to the Arabs' "throwing and stepping on God's holy body and blood or upon the relics of the holy apostles and his martyrs ... punishing others on behalf of their faith ... or defiling of sanctuaries or holy places"³⁵⁹ ... closing down of churches, or blood shedding, or unjustly and ruthlessly punishing several people,"³⁶⁰ he does not ascribe "all these evil actions that the Arabs committed upon the lands and the Christian populations"³⁶¹ to God's decree and permission. On the contrary, following the well-established theological scheme, he explains that Christians have been delivered to the Arabs by God for edifying purposes, due to the formers' sins. He significantly adds, though, that sometimes God's tool treats

³⁵⁷ See Griffith, "Anastasios of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims;" and Richard, "Anastasius the Sinaïte."

³⁵⁸ See Haldon, "Anastasius of Sinai."

³⁵⁹ *Quaest.* 101, 161.

³⁶⁰ *Quaest.* 101, 162.

³⁶¹ *Quaest.* 101, 161.

his people unmercifully, and this maltreatment compels God to intervene and destroy his instrument of instruction, as the relevant Old Testament example he adduces shows.³⁶² Anastasius concluding his answer, expresses the hope that soon something similar will happen in the contemporary situation.³⁶³ However, it seems that he was not so optimistic about the change in the human behaviour and attitudes towards God; or he might actually have been pragmatic, realising the permanence of the Arab presence, and attempting to change the focus of his coreligionists, from expectations of imperial triumph and restoration, towards the consolidation of their Christian faith, thus implying that the Christians had to adapt to the current situation: "... it is due to our sins that we have been delivered to such tyrants, albeit we did not turn aside of the misdeeds, but even being amidst the afflictions we are committing the evil deeds. And believe me when I say that if the Saracen nation departs from us today, straightway the Blues and Greens will rise again tomorrow and slay each other, the East and Arabia and Palestine and many other lands."³⁶⁴ Anastasius seems to follow the accepted view of the invasions as God's chastisement due to the sins of the Christians, though he connects the latter with the heresy of Monophysitism-Monothelism.

The latter attitude is eloquently expressed in his short account of the Monothelite issue, where the sequence of historical events is somewhat distorted:³⁶⁵ "When Herakleios died, Martin was exiled by Herakleios' grandson and immediately the desert dweller Amalek rose up to strike us, Christ's people. That was the first terrible and fatal defeat of the Roman army. I am speaking of the bloodshed at Gabitha, Yarmuk and Dathemon, after which occurred the capture and burning of the cities of Palestine, even Caesarea and Jerusalem. Then there was the destruction of Egypt, followed by the enslavement and fatal devastations of the Mediterranean lands and islands and of all the Roman Empire. But the rulers and masters of the Romans did not manage to perceive these things. Rather they summoned the most eminent men in the Roman Church, and had their tongues and hands excised. And

³⁶² *Quaest.* 101, 161.

³⁶³ *Quaest.* 101, 162.

³⁶⁴ *Quaest.* 65, 117.

³⁶⁵ Hoyland suggests Anastasius' convictions and remoteness in time for this distortion, *Seeing Islam*, 102.

what then? The retribution upon us from God for these things was the almost complete loss of the Roman army and navy at Phoenix, and the progressive desolation of all the Christian people and places. This did not stop until the persecutor of Martin perished by the sword in Sicily. But the son of this man, the pious Constantine, united the holy Church by means of an ecumenical council... This blessed council... has for twenty years halted the decimation of our people, turned the sword of our enemies against one another, given respite to the lands, calmed the seas, checked the enslavement, and brought relaxation, consolation and peace in great measure.”³⁶⁶

As has already been said, Anastasius’ witness is important considering certain aspects of the religious convictions of the conquerors, including their Christological beliefs, as well as their concerns about predestination and free will. What makes Anastasius’ contribution valuable overall, however, is the illumination —through his works— of the historical context of his time. Averil Cameron, expressing the uncomfortable position of historians when they have to deal with the literary disputes between Christians and Muslims, noted that “if we knew how often the ordinary Christian and the ordinary Muslim talked to each other, instead of how they are represented in the confrontational dialogues, we might have a much more realistic impression.”³⁶⁷ Although Anastasius’ works do not offer us such knowledge, at least they provide us with some clear indications on how real disputations and dialogues among Christians, of several convictions, and Muslims, might have enhanced the cultural interactions between the conquerors and the conquered, and might have helped the development of Muslim theology as well.

A last interesting point about Anastasius’ attitude concerning Arabs/Muslims and their religion, is his view about their faith, not as another distinct religion addressed to a different God but as another faith towards the one and the same God.³⁶⁸ Moreover, when Anastasius talks about the Arabs, he talks almost exclusively about their religious beliefs; it seems as though he mainly considers them to be another distinct religious group and this attests to

³⁶⁶ PG 89, 1156C (trans. by Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 102-103).

³⁶⁷ Cameron, “New Themes,” 103.

³⁶⁸ See Flusin’s comments in “Démones et Sarassins,” 408.

the Arabs'/Muslims' desire to assert their own distinct religious conviction against Christianity. His decision to register them in the list of the heretical groups and deviators of faith marks a remarkable shift from the well-known conception of the Arabs as an ethnic-cultural group to a comprehension of them, based on religious terms.³⁶⁹ This indication points to Anastasius' treatment of the Arabs/Muslims as the carriers of a faith hostile to Christianity—regardless of their position as the ruling elite of the conquerors—and his subsequent effort to put certain spiritual boundaries, whose trespassing would lead to apostasy; thus, his answer to the imminent problem of conversion was articulated in his connection of the Arabs with the demons, the constant and abominating enemies of Christianity.

There is a general consensus that initial Byzantine references about the Arabs/Muslims and the invasions are very few and poor; “it is interesting how little one can find in the Byzantine sources of the seventh century about the momentous event of the Muslim conquest.”³⁷⁰ Nevertheless, several scholars have pointed not to the scarcity or lack of sources, but to the ways we approach them; consequently Cameron called for a re-evaluation of the same sources through new sets of questions that the available texts can offer, and Haldon like Hoyland, pointed to the need for new perspectives on the study of the Byzantine sources.³⁷¹

Notwithstanding the legitimacy of the increasing interest of the historians for that period, it should be remembered that it is only in hindsight that the importance of the invasions and the formation of Islam can be appreciated; this fact was not apparent as such to the contemporaries. As can be easily understood from the outline presented earlier, “the rise of Islam took place against an existing context of rapid social and economic change,”³⁷² as well as upon a milieu heavily affected by the Persian invasions and religio-culturally

³⁶⁹ Cf. Griffith, “Anastasios of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims,” 350.

³⁷⁰ Gero, “Early Contacts,” 126.

³⁷¹ Cameron (“New Themes,” 104-105) says that, in order to explore fruitfully the seventh-century Byzantine literature in relation to Islam “we must first recognise the extent to which it [Byzantine literature] was conditioned by what was happening in the Byzantine world ... The inhabitants of the Arab-ruled provinces had had a severe identity problem even before the conquests, and the impact of Islam inevitably worsened it.” Cf. also Haldon; and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 559.

³⁷² Cameron, “New Themes,” 84.

divided. The populations of the Near East had been harshly tested by the Persian invasions and occupation of their territories for almost twenty years. The victorious recovery of the Byzantine territory by the emperor Herakleios, and the subsequent restoration of Byzantine rule, not only relieved the Christians but could have made them perceive the ‘barbarian’ invasions and occupancy, regardless of their harshness, as temporary events, brought upon them by divine wrath due to their sins. As a result, the arrival of the Arabs might not have been seen as an event of paramount significance, and this can actually be inferred from the references of both Maximus and Sophronius; even Anastasius of Sinai (in the aftermath of the second civil war) expresses hopes for a change in the situation. A similar attitude is well attested to other non-Muslim sources of Greek or Syriac provenance, e.g. *Trophies of Damascus* and John bar Penkaye.³⁷³ On the other hand, the theological conflicts and the issue of Monophysitism-Monothelitism haunted the minds and everyday life of contemporary Christians and defined their priorities and concerns. The main witnesses of the Arabs’ presence (Maximus, Sophronius and Anastasius) are actually the proponents of Chalcedonian orthodoxy and their concerns, as expressed in their theological texts, are directed against Monoenergism and Monothelitism.

A comparison of the Byzantine sources with the available eastern non-Muslim references, concerning the attitudes against Arabs and Islam, in general reveals that the latter present similar ideas to the Byzantine sources surveyed; although in certain cases, and contrary to the Byzantine sources, they ascribe the advent of the invading Arabs to the heretical views of the Chalcedonians.³⁷⁴ A conspicuous exception is found in certain references from the Church of the East (the Nestorians, in Chalcedonian terms). The reasons for this exception should be sought in the persecutions and the hard criticism that the Church of the East faced both from Byzantine Chalcedonian orthodoxy and the western Syrian Jacobites. Their political allegiance with the Sasanids and the rejection of any connection to Byzantine rule have greatly weakened their minority status after the victorious campaigns of

³⁷³ As Hoyland (*Seeing Islam*, 459) already noticed.

³⁷⁴ See n. 387, below.

Herakleios.³⁷⁵ In addition to this, during the seventh century, there was an expansion of the western Syriac Church (the Jacobites) into north Mesopotamia at the expense of the Nestorians.³⁷⁶ Consequently, they counted on the new Arab-rule as a means of restoring their erstwhile-lost status while safeguarding their religious authority in the east, intact from the interference of the other Christian Churches. Thus, in Isho 'yahb III of Adiabene's (d. 659) earliest references, Muslims are presented through their dealings with the Christians:³⁷⁷ "For the Muslim Arabs do not aid those who say that God, Lord of all, suffered and died;" "as for the Arabs, to whom God has at this time given rule over the world... not only do they not oppose Christianity, but they praise our faith, honour the priests and saints of our Lord, and give aid to the churches and monasteries."³⁷⁸ John bar Penkaye (d. 687) also, expressed similar attitudes towards Arabs. Regardless of these positive references though, we should not fail to notice that the Arabs' advent is considered to be God's punishment, and John bar Penkaye's work concludes on an apocalyptic tone, considering "the destruction of the Ishmaelites" as imminent.³⁷⁹

However, an interesting question that arises from the comparison of the Byzantine references to other eastern Christian references of that period, concerns the quantity, depth and the mass of information transferred by the latter.³⁸⁰ How should we account for this difference between the two sources, and what particular reasons might have affected it? Before discussing this issue, some remarks should be made concerning the afore-mentioned sources. From the whole body of the relevant references, only that of Sebeos (ca. 660s)

³⁷⁵ For a historical outline and an analysis of the theological views of the Syrian Church of the East see the several works of Sebastian Brock, some of them now conveniently gathered in Brock, *Sebastian Fire from Heaven: Studies in Syriac Theology and Liturgy*, Aldershot 2006; and idem, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, Aldershot 1984. For the history of this Church see Baumer, Christoph *The Church of the East: An Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity*, London 2006.

³⁷⁶ Brock, Sebastian, "Syriac Views on Emergent Islam" in Juynboll, G. H. A. (ed.) *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, Carbondale 1982, 9-21, now in idem, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, Aldershot 1984 (VIII).

³⁷⁷ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 179; cf. Brock, "Syriac Views on Emergent Islam," 16.

³⁷⁸ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 179.

³⁷⁹ Brock, "Syriac Views on Emergent Islam," 19; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 199.

³⁸⁰ These sources are conveniently gathered in Hoyland's *Seeing Islam* and Palmer, Andrew N. (with Brock, Sebastian P. & Hoyland, Robert G.) *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*, Liverpool 1993. In addition to these, see John of Nikiu, *The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu*, ed. and trans. by R. H. Charles, London 1916; and Thomson, R. W. (trans.) *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, (historical commentary by Howard-Johnston, James & Greenwood, Tim), Liverpool 1999.

stands out due to its early date, rich information and transmission of valuable knowledge about the Arabs' invasions and religious tenets. While several Syriac sources convey some interesting details about the Arabs/Muslims,³⁸¹ this transmission seems to accumulate both in capacity and knowledge after the third quarter of the seventh century. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that the first (though incidental) references to the invasions come from Byzantine sources from around 634 until 638; the next references (leaving aside the material found in the papyri) appear in the 680s and come only from one witness, Anastasius of Sinai. Quite interestingly, the alleged alliance of the Jews with the invading Arabs (found for the first time in the *Doctrina*, Maximus, and Sophronius) appears again in Sebeos' testimony, thus, revealing either common perceptions or common widespread knowledge.

Not long after the invasions, the Chalcedonians quickly found themselves in an extremely uncomfortable position: while they used to enjoy the privileged status of the official representatives of the Byzantine Empire and orthodoxy to the Near East, they now had to rub shoulders with other religious and Christian groups, transformed into another minority community under the newly-established Arab rule. Meanwhile, several Byzantine officials and the army, who had previously been in control, had swiftly moved from the Near East, followed by a great —although unknown— number of Chalcedonian Christians, who preferred to migrate to the Byzantine territories than stay in the conquered areas of the Near East. As a result, the aftermath of the Arab invasions found the Chalcedonians weakened and uncertain about their future; in addition to this, the difficulty of communication between the imperial centre and the conquered provinces contributed to the worsening of their situation. From now on, they had to rely upon themselves in order to be able to survive in an altogether changing environment. On the contrary, the anti-Chalcedonian Christian groups had long ago been used to existing as minority groups and to facing the exigencies of time without any reference or support outside their own community; moreover, they had managed to organise their life and mission, and to consolidate their presence in the inimical environment

³⁸¹ Like the name of the Prophet and the connection of Arabs' religion to the Abrahamic heritage.

defined by the jurisdiction of Byzantium's authority and doctrinal confession. As mentioned at the beginning of this discussion, the Byzantine references derive mainly from theologians and ecclesiastics outside the imperial centre; Sophronius was actually the last patriarch of Jerusalem before the conquests. The scarcity of sources seems to be strongly connected with the situation that the eastern patriarchates were found in in the aftermath of the invasions. The Jerusalem patriarchate was the heart of Chalcedonian orthodoxy in the east, but after the death of Sophronius in 638, the patriarchal see remained vacant for almost thirty years, partly because "of the Monothelite politics of the Constantinopolitan Church and the state, and partly [because] of the Muslim conquests and their consolidation."³⁸² Although there is some evidence that certain clergy did attend the Councils (Sixth and Quinisext) that took place in Constantinople, "it was only in 706 and 744 that Chalcedonian patriarchs were elected once again in Jerusalem and Alexandria respectively."³⁸³ As for the see of Antioch, which, from 656 to 681, was occupied by Macarius, who resided in Constantinople and was deposed by the Sixth Ecumenical Council (681) on account of his Monothelism, it was only in 742 that the Chalcedonian patriarch of Antioch was finally allowed to take up his position.³⁸⁴ Furthermore, as Griffith noted, the period from the conquests until the reappearance of Byzantine rule in Antioch in 967 was marked by "a steady decline in the numbers of 'Melkites' and the gradual disappearance of their institutions in many places outside Palestine."³⁸⁵ As an immediate result of the conquests, the Chalcedonian communities of the East were left devoid of both political, as well as ecclesiastical support, ruled by a foreign power and had an equal minority status with their erstwhile religious opponents. In this apparently uncomfortable situation, it seems that their main concerns and efforts might have been focused on meeting the distressing exigencies of time, thus, safeguarding their survival and presence in the changing Near Eastern milieu. Unsurprisingly then, and not coincidentally, they kept their previous

³⁸² Haldon, "Anastasius of Sinai," 114.

³⁸³ See Haldon, *Byzantium*, 288.

³⁸⁴ Haldon, *Byzantium*, 288.

³⁸⁵ Griffith, Sidney "'Melkites', 'Jacobites' and the Christological Controversies in Arabic in Third/Ninth-century Syria" in Thomas, David *Syrian Christians under Islam. The First Thousand Years*, Leiden 2001, 17.

role in the Umayyad administration, and they were among the first Christian community of the East to adapt to Arabisation.³⁸⁶

Monophysitism debates and conflicts, which had already alienated and split the Christian communities in the Near East, still dominated the interests and concerns of Christians even after the storming invasions of the Arabs, but now in the form of Monotheletism and Monoenergism. Not coincidentally, all the afore-mentioned Byzantine informants of that period were the most celebrated opponents of Monotheletism–Monoenergism. It is in the context of their fight against Monotheletism that the references regarding Arabs are to be found; Anastasius' *Viae Dux* is actually his *opus magnum* against Monotheletism. For Maximus, Sophronius and Anastasius—and undoubtedly for the vast majority of Chalcedonians—the reasons for the appearance of the Arabs were sought in the advance of the heretical views of the Monotheletes, be they emperors or individuals; consequently, their repentance was mainly focused on abstinence from heresy. Quite interestingly, the 'heretical' opponents of the Chalcedonians adduced the same reasons for divine punishment, though they held the Chalcedonians and their beliefs responsible for the outburst of divine wrath and the arrival of the Arabs.³⁸⁷ All these reactions and shared conceptions among the Christian communities point to the paramount importance of the theological debates and conflicts of that period upon the lives and thoughts of the populations. Although, with hindsight, we see the Arab invasions as the crucial fact that changed the fate of the Near East, it seems that these events did not have the same importance for the inhabitants of the conquered areas. From the available sources, it seems that the Christian populations regarded the theological conflict of Monotheletism/Monoenergism as an issue of the utmost significance for their

³⁸⁶ See Griffith, Sidney *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine*, Aldershot 1992. For a discussion about the fate of this community, see ch. 5, below.

³⁸⁷ Cf. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, 335. See characteristically the reference of John of Nikiu: "This chastisement has befallen the earth owing to the heresy of the emperor Maurice... When they [the Romans] rejected the orthodox faith, which is our faith, in like manner were they rejected from the imperial throne. And there has followed the undoing of all Christians that are in the world..." John of Nikiu, *The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu*, 163, 198. George of Resh'aina also, accusing Maximus the Confessor of heresy, writes in his 'Syriac Life of Maximus': "After Maximus went to Rome, the Arabs seized control of the islands of the sea and entered Cyprus and Arwad, ravaging them and taking captives. They gained control over Africa and subdued almost all the islands of the sea; for, following the wicked Maximus, the wrath of God punished every place which had accepted his error," Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 141.

lives, and they judged and explained the Arab invasions accordingly. On the other hand, since the arrival of the Arabs and the rise of Islam acted as catalysts for the developments in the Near East, the inhabitants of the conquered territories gradually came to accept the permanency of the Arab settlement, and the ensuing need for satisfactory interpretations of this evolution.

Constantinople seems to be absent from the scenery, although its impact “on the east even after the conquests should not be underestimated.”³⁸⁸ There is a considerable dearth of any historical information coming from the imperial centre, and we have to wait until the early ninth century for the work of Theophanes in order to find some references to the invasions and the ideas of the Arabs/Muslims. However, it is the repercussions of the invasions that were felt in the imperial capital. Certainly the situation in the east would have raised questions about the reasons for the Byzantine destruction, as well as about the character and the qualities of the invaders. In addition to this, the break in the communication networks between the centre and the provinces of the east, during the first thirty years of conquests, might have intensified the imperial interest in the situation in the east. It seems then, that the imperial attempts focused on searching for a scapegoat, thus revealing the, yet unsolved problems, of conflicting authorities between the emperor and the Church; pope Martin and Maximus the Confessor were put on trial in Constantinople. In this trial, both men were accused of being traitors to the Byzantine state because they had either helped or supported the advance of the Arabs in the east.³⁸⁹ Although the emperor Constans II had issued the *Typos* and had promulgated Monotheletism, he accused these preeminent anti-Monothelete ecclesiastics of collaboration with the enemy, i.e. on the basis of political crimes and not on religious ones. Maximus defended himself against the emperor’s accusations but he refused to accept the latter’s insistence that he recognised imperial supremacy over Church authority, in order to save his life.³⁹⁰ Apparently, as this trial points out, it was due to the repercussions of the Arab invasions that such issues of conflicting authorities were emerged. In

³⁸⁸ Cameron, Averil “The Eastern Provinces in the Seventh Century,” 312.

³⁸⁹ For the trial see Relatio Motionis,” *PG* 90, 109–130.

³⁹⁰ For an analysis of the trial see Sahas, Daniel J. “The Demonizing Force of the Arab Conquests;” and Haldon, John “Ideology and the Byzantine State in the Seventh Century.”

other words, although Constantinople remains ‘silent’ about the invasions, it is clear that the consequences of the Arab presence in the east had a great impact on the imperial centre; they also shaped Byzantine politics and encouraged the search for sustainable answers to this disturbing phenomenon. Such an effort is reflected in the 18th Canon of the Quinisext Ecumenical Council at the end of the seventh century (692). In it, the clergy who left their provinces on the pretext of barbarian invasions are ordered to return and not abandon them.³⁹¹ It seems that, albeit slowly and gradually, the Byzantine centre began to realise the permanency of the Arab rule in the conquered territories and tried to answer accordingly, meeting the demands of the Christian populations.

Chapter 3

3. Apocalyptic responses to the Muslim challenge

3. 1. Introduction

By the end of the seventh century, the people of the Middle East came to realise that the invading Arabs were there to stay. The politico-religious entity that the Islamic Caliphate presented, especially after the Marwanid reforms, helped both the inhabitants of the Middle East and the Byzantines to accept this reality. After almost seventy years of permanently occupying of the former Eastern Byzantine Provinces and victoriously expanding east and westwards, the Muslims not only persisted but also continuously attacked Anatolia and Asia Minor, threatening even the capital itself with their constant raids. Inevitably, the until then exegetical scheme, which considered the Muslims to be the temporary instrument of God’s wrath, because of the Christians’ sins or heretical attitudes, did not seem enough to meaningfully explain the present situation. Consequently, they turned to apocalypticism for a coherent response to the Muslim persistence and Christian defeat. For reasons that will be explained shortly, this action was not coincidental but it emerged from the inner logic of the monotheistic tradition. Unsurprisingly

³⁹¹Mansi, XI, 964A-C and 964D.

then, the increase of apocalyptic and eschatological expectations by the end of the seventh century, appears as a common phenomenon to all the monotheistic religions of the Middle East.

In this chapter the Byzantine apocalyptic attitude towards Muslims will be presented and explained, but most importantly it will be deciphered in order for the historical facts, views, and concerns related to the thesis, to be unveiled. Consequently, apart from an investigation of the most important texts of this genre, our attention will also be directed towards the more pragmatic or profane events and realities of that period, such as the coinage reformation by both the Byzantine Emperor and the Muslim Caliph. A discussion will then follow on the contemporary development of the Muslim apocalypticism against the Christian Byzantium. Although the motivating factors of the Muslim and Byzantine apocalypticisms differ, it seems that both of them concentrate their eschatological interest on Constantinople; something which is effectively translated into real, historical terms, and which will be discussed in greater detail shortly.

The word apocalypse (*apokalypse*) means ‘revelation’, the unveiling of a divine secret. The origins of the term apocalypticism show that it is a highly complex phenomenon, and although it is related to the term *eschatology* (a very common term in Religious Studies), it should be clearly distinguished from it, being rather a species of the genus eschatology (a certain belief about the last things, the end of history).³⁹²

Several criteria, for the identification of the apocalypticism as a distinctive genre, have been suggested;³⁹³ an apocalyptic narrative should involve both a temporal and a spatial dimension, disclosing a transcendental reality and envisaging retribution beyond death, while the absence or presence of a title is not regarded as a decisive characteristic. It is rather the language, the symbolic character and the “pervasive use of allusions to traditional imagery”³⁹⁴ that lead to the internal cohesion of apocalyptic texts, and frame the message of the apocalypse as such, for the reader. Apocalyptic literature

³⁹² See McGinn, Bernard *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle East*, New York 1998, 3.

³⁹³ McGinn, *Visions of the End*, ch. 1. See also Hellholm, David (ed.) *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen 1989 (2nd ed.).

³⁹⁴ McGinn, *Visions of the End*, 17.

generates from historical and social circumstances, and is a 'scribal phenomenon,'³⁹⁵ a product of literary men. Finally, apart from rhetorical schemes, some widespread devices from Hellenistic times, such as pseudonymity, prophecies *ex eventu*, and periodisation, are usually employed in order to intensify the highly dramatic form of these texts and increase their credibility.

The Byzantine apocalypticism derives from the wider current of the Jewish apocalyptic tradition that flourished in the Hellenistic setting of Late Antiquity (200 B.C.-100 A.D.).³⁹⁶ Its main sources, ideas and allusions originate from the Biblical texts; actually its fundamental presuppositions are both Old and New Testament prophecies, and a notion that the world had a finite and calculable lifespan.³⁹⁷ Having said this, it should be noted that the Byzantine apocalyptic and eschatological influences derive mainly from the Book of *Daniel* (ch. 2 and 7), *Ezekiel* (ch. 38-39), the Synoptic Gospels (*Mt* 24, *Mc* 13, *Lc* 21) and Paul's *II Epistle to Thessalonians* (2, 7-8) and not so much from John's *Apocalypse*, due to latter's disputed canonical status in Byzantium.³⁹⁸ John's *Apocalypse* though offered certain images and conceptions, which permeate most of the apocalyptic texts (e.g. such as the Antichrist and his forerunner). It is inside these texts that the prevailing themes of the Byzantine apocalypticism are found, i.e. the notion of the four kingdoms or beasts, the notion of Gog and Magog and Antichrist.³⁹⁹ While in the field of Biblical studies, scholars tend to discuss the relevant texts in such strict definitional boundaries, in the case of the Byzantine apocalypticism our approach should be more broad and flexible because, here, both apocalyptic and eschatological elements usually intermingle.⁴⁰⁰ This is hardly surprising since the Christian apocalypse's linear and teleological perspective of history

³⁹⁵ Smith, J. Z. "Wisdom and Apocalyptic" in Pearson, B. (ed.) *Religious Syncretism in Antiquity*, Missoula MT 1975, 140.

³⁹⁶ See particularly Podskalsky, G. *Byzantinische Reicheschatologie*, Munich 1972; Alexander, Paul *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, Berkeley 1985; Mango, Cyril *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome*, London 1980 (ch. 11, The Future of Mankind).

³⁹⁷ Cf. Magdalino, "The History of the Future," 4.

³⁹⁸ See Mango, Cyril "Le temps dans les commentaires byzantins de l'Apocalypse," *Le temps chrétien de la fin de l'Antiquité au Moyen Age: III^e-XII^e siècles*, Paris 9-12 mars 1981, *Colloques internationaux du CNRS No 604*, Paris 1984, 431; and idem., *Byzantium*, 216.

³⁹⁹ See Mango, Cyril *Byzantium*, 202.

⁴⁰⁰ McGinn, Bernard *Visions of the End*, 3-4; Collins, John J. *The Apocalyptic Imagination: an Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, Michigan (2nd ed.), 10.

—upon which the Byzantine apocalypticism is based— implies an eschatological vision of the end, towards the fulfilment of which human efforts should aim.

Eschatological thinking and apocalyptic imagination, being concomitants of paramount importance of Byzantine society and culture, not only have been shaped by history —as relevant religious and anthropological studies usually show— but they have actually shaped and formed the development of Byzantine theology, culture and ideas.⁴⁰¹ Furthermore, while it is true that eschatology did not have a great appeal to the intellectuals, “we must also be careful not to draw too sharp a contrast between ‘high’ theology and ‘low’ superstition.”⁴⁰² Albeit its different ways of expression, eschatology was a prevailing factor for both Byzantine theology and popular belief. In other words, the authors of the apocalyptic texts, as well as their audience, were functioning in the same cultural and linguistic milieu; therefore a more or, sometimes, less perfect understanding of the message and its codes of articulation should be expected, from the part of the readers.

The texts under study here cover the period between the late seventh to mid-eighth century, and although, their apparent reason for existence was to respond to the Arab conquests, the adoption of an apocalyptic form and language comes mainly as a result of the procedures taking place from the sixth century; “a time of intense and intensifying eschatological apprehension,”⁴⁰³ as P. Magdalino convincingly argued (against Vasiliev’s views);⁴⁰⁴ It comes as no surprise then, that two of the four surviving Byzantine commentaries on John’s *Apocalypse* come from this period.⁴⁰⁵ On the other hand, as Mango has shown, Herakleios celebrated his victory over the Persians in a ‘deliberately apocalyptic’ style: “the campaigns of Herakleios against Persia lasted six years, like the Six Days of Creation. His

⁴⁰¹ See Magdalino, “The History of the Future.”

⁴⁰² See Magdalino, “The History of the Future,” 9. Cf. also Mango, *Byzantium*, ch. 11.

⁴⁰³ Magdalino, “The History of the Future,” 7.

⁴⁰⁴ Vasiliev, Alexander A. “Medieval Ideas of the End of the World: West and East,” *Byzantion* 16, Fasc. 2 (1942-1943), 462-502. Magdalino, as well as Alexander before him, strongly and persuasively opposed to Vasiliev’s view that there was no eschatological intensification around the year 500; see Magdalino, “The History of the Future,” 4-5.

⁴⁰⁵ Oikoumenios, Hoskier, H. C. (ed.) *The Complete Commentary of Oecumenius on the Apocalypse*, Ann Arbor 1928; Andreas of Caesaria, Schmid, J. (ed.) *Studien zur Geschichte des griechischen Apokalypse-Textes*, I, Munich 1955.

triumphal return to the capital (628) corresponded to the divine Sabbath and was followed by what can only be interpreted as a deliberately apocalyptic act,” his journey to Jerusalem to thank God and restore to Mount Golgotha the relic of the True Cross. Furthermore, when the caliph Umar entered Jerusalem, the patriarch Sophronius is said to have exclaimed, “Truly, this is the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place as affirmed by the prophet Daniel.”⁴⁰⁶ From now on, the words ‘Antichrist’ or ‘forerunner of Antichrist’ will become a common phrase to monastic writers⁴⁰⁷ “with a dogmatic axe to grind.”⁴⁰⁸ Hence, from the seventh century, the apocalyptic dimension of the historical phenomena becomes an established Byzantine view of history, a concept that has outlived even Byzantium itself.⁴⁰⁹ Our examination of historical events, and especially in the field of the history of mentalities, should seriously consider the apocalyptic dimension as a major Byzantine concern and a way of interpreting the future and the fate of the empire.

As previously mentioned, what makes these Byzantine apocalyptic texts important for our study is the fact that they constitute the first deliberate references and specific responses to the Muslim challenge.⁴¹⁰ Their *raison d’être* is to offer consolation and a deeper meaning to the distressing situation, in which the Christians found themselves after the Arab conquest and occupation of their lands. In addition to this, a paraenetic purpose has been also suggested,⁴¹¹ i.e. these texts try to persuade their readers to endure during the trials they face and keep their faith safe and sound until God’s impending deliverance. Not surprisingly, over the passage of time, the several copyists have also added their own worries and concerns with reference to their historical context. Such purposes should be seriously considered, in the attempt to describe the image of the Muslims that this literature presents,

⁴⁰⁶ *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. by C. de Boor, Leipsig 1883-1885, A.M. 6127, 339.

⁴⁰⁷ E.g. Anastasios Sinaïtes, John of Damascus, Theophanes.

⁴⁰⁸ Magdalino, “The History of the Future,” 30.

⁴⁰⁹ Through the resurface of the apocalyptic literature, during the period of Ottoman rule. See Kariotoglou, Alexandros *Ἡ περὶ τοῦ Ἰσλάμ καὶ τῆς πτώσεως αὐτοῦ ἐλληνικὴ χρησμολογικὴ γραμματεία: ἀπὸ τῶν ἀρχῶν τοῦ 16^{ου} αἰ. Μέχρι καὶ τοῦ τέλους τοῦ 18^{ου} αἰ.*, PhD. Thesis, University of Athens, Athens 1982.

⁴¹⁰ Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 257.

⁴¹¹ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 257.

since deliberate hyperbolae and highly inimical depictions are quite understandably expected.

The late Byzantinist Paul Alexander, who has worked systematically on Byzantine apocalyptic material, defined the following set of questions by which the apocalypses should be approached: “a historian must begin by asking a number of questions: Can he ascertain the date and place of composition of apocalyptic texts? Were they more or less evenly distributed in time and place, or were some occasions and localities especially favourable for the production of such writings? In what circles did they originate, and to what audiences were they addressed? For what purpose or purposes were apocalypses written, rewritten, copied, excerpted, and translated? What conventions did the writers follow? To what extent can apocalypses be used by the historian to corroborate historical facts contained in other, especially narrative, sources? What do they reveal concerning the reactions of individuals and groups to historical events, their judgments on the course of history, and their hopes and fears for the future?”⁴¹² Although it appears that his famous dictum, “medieval apocalypses ... are chronicles written in the future tense,”⁴¹³ is a rather optimistic view of the use of apocalypses as historical sources, the aforementioned set of questions seems to be useful and insightful for the exploration of these texts. The main apocalyptic texts that will be considered are the Greek translation of the Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara (or Olympus), the Vision of Daniel, and the Andreas’ Salos Apocalypse.

3. 2. Ps. Methodius

The most important and informative apocalyptic text is the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius. The Greek text has been rather faithfully rendered from

⁴¹² Alexander, Paul J. “Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources,” *American Historical Review* 73 (1968), 998.

⁴¹³ Alexander, “Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources,” 1018.

the original Syriac text,⁴¹⁴ apart from minor errors, omissions, and changes.⁴¹⁵ It is ascribed to St. Methodius, martyr bishop of Patara (d. 312), instead of 'Olympus' according to the Syriac text. There is still a dispute about the date of the composition of the Syriac original text. E. Sackur, who edited one of the first Latin versions, suggested a date around 680.⁴¹⁶ Kmosko, who actually first proposed the primacy of the Syriac text over the Greek, dated it not long after 660,⁴¹⁷ and Alexander agreed on that dating.⁴¹⁸ However, recent studies by S. Brock and G. Reinink⁴¹⁹ convincingly argued that it must have been written in North Mesopotamia, between 685 and 692, and with all probability around 690-692, near the expiration of the tenth 'week of years' (that the author allots to the Arab ruling), when also "rumours of Abd al-Malik's tax reforms reached Mesopotamia."⁴²⁰

Since the Greek text was composed very soon after the Syriac original, and it was the basis for the Latin translation (of which, the oldest known manuscript dates from late 720s),⁴²¹ we can place it around the end of the seventh century or the beginnings of the eighth. Its author,⁴²² given that he knew the Syriac language, might have been a refugee from the eastern areas, occupied by the Arabs. He lived and composed it in the limits of the Byzantine Empire and addressed it to a Byzantine audience, as his use of the Greek Bible and the character of omissions, adaptations or corrections, made

⁴¹⁴ For the Syriac original, see now Martinez, Francisco Javier *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period: Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasios*, PhD. thesis, Catholic University of America, 1985.

⁴¹⁵ E.g. the Greek translator omits the brief preamble of the Syriac text, replaces a reference concerning internal disagreements of eastern Syrian clerics. The most radical differentiation from the Syriac text though, is the replacement of the part that discusses the past victories of Rome; the Greek translator while stresses the Roman invincibility, he limits the history of the Jewish people. For a detailed discussion, see Alexander, Paul J. *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, Berkeley 1985, 52-60; and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 295-297.

⁴¹⁶ Sackur, Ernst *Sibyllinische Texte und forschungen: Pseudomethodius, Adso, und Die tiburtinische sibylle*, Halle 1898, 57.

⁴¹⁷ Kmosko, Michael "Das Rätsel des Pseudomethodius," *Byzantion* 6 (1931), 285.

⁴¹⁸ Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 25.

⁴¹⁹ Brock, Sebastian "Syriac Views of Emergent Islam" in Juynboll, G. H. A. (ed.) *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, now in idem, *Syriac Perspectives of Late Antiquity*, London 1984; Reinink, G. J. "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam" in Cameron, Av. & Conrad, L. (eds) *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East I: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, Princeton 1992.

⁴²⁰ Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam," 178.

⁴²¹ Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam," 155, n. 24.

⁴²² Although the Greek text is a translation, its translator has translated/transferred the text according to his own concerns and to Byzantine considerations; therefore, I will call him as the author or Pseudo-Methodius.

to the Syriac original text, reveal.⁴²³ Although four major redactions of the Greek text exist, in this study we are going to deal mainly with the first one, because it is the oldest and the most complete.⁴²⁴ The interpolation (XIII.7-10, ed. Lolos, 120-122) concerning the siege of Constantinople in 674, constitutes a common practice by the copyists and redactionists, to ‘update’ the apocalyptic texts, by adding events of their own historical time as *vaticinia ex eventu*. In any case, the whole text reflects the impact that the Arab conquests and dominance had upon the populations of the empire, as well as some of their feelings, sentiments, and the atmosphere in the late seventh century. Whilst today it seems highly improbable that a more precise date can be given, it has to be emphasised that its wide diffusion, redactions, and translations (Greek, Latin, and Slavic) make it one of the major and basic apocalyptic texts of the Middle Ages, which exercised an immense influence upon the apocalyptic literature of both the East and the West. In the meantime its wide circulation reveals on the one hand the common concerns and ideas shared by the populations into which it was presented, and on the other the possible ways and influences it exercised on shaping the same populations’ beliefs about the Muslims.

The work, as we are informed by its title, is a “treatise about the kingship of the nations and a sure demonstration of the last times.”⁴²⁵ From the very beginning, the author warns his audience that they should expect a discussion not of the Byzantine emperors but of pagan rulers in connection with the last days; such a reference obviously alerted the Byzantine reader to its apocalyptic content, alluding to the traditional pattern of four kingdoms mentioned in Daniel’s prophecy, where Babylonians, Medes, Persians, and Greek/Romans are related to the last days.

The whole work is divided into two parts, following the division of the Syriac text. The first part, starting with Adam and Eve’s departure from

⁴²³ For which see Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 52-60.

⁴²⁴ See Pseudo-Methodius, *Die Apokalypse des Ps.-Methodios*, (ed. and trans. by Lolos, A.), Beiträge zur Klassischen Philologie, part 83, Meisenheim am Glan 1976; and *Die dritte und vierte Redaktion des Ps.-Methodios*, (ed. trans. by Lolos, A.), Beiträge zur Klassischen Philologie, part 94, Meisenheim am Glan 1978.

⁴²⁵ I follow the critical edition of the first redaction done by Lolos: Pseudo-Methodius, *Die Apokalypse des Ps.-Methodios*, ed. by A. Lolos, Beiträge zur Klassischen Philologie, part 83, Meisenheim am Glan 1976, title, 46. The translations are mine, unless it is stated otherwise.

Paradise, discusses a ‘political’ history of humanity through the succession of kingdoms, in a time span of six millennia, to end up in the “last millennium, that is the seventh, in which the kingdom of the Persians will be uprooted, and in which the seed of Ishmael will come out of the desert of Yethrib,”⁴²⁶ where the second part of the narrative starts, referring to the things that will happen before the end of the world. It is thus clearly divided into a ‘historical’ and a ‘prophetic’ part, though the ‘prophetic’ part appears, due to its *vaticinia ex eventu*, as the historic part of the whole composition. This division is obvious even in the use of tenses: while the past tense is used for the former part, the latter is mainly written in the future tense (the usual tense of prophetic utterances).

Inside the text, the Muslims are always referred to as the “sons of Ishmael,” (“son of Hagar”), “Ishmaelites,” “seed of Ishmael,” or simply “Ishmael” (*pars pro toto*). The author follows an established way, in both the Biblical and cultural context of his era, to express nationhood or names of generations, by the use of their progenitor’s name. In this Biblical rendering though, there is an unmistakeable contradistinction (to the —blessed and chosen— sons of Israel), which might have been further intensified in the mind of the readers, who considered themselves as the new Israel. The reference also to “the sons of Ishmael from Hagar, who was called arm of the south by the Scripture, namely Daniel”⁴²⁷ should have alerted readers, to the apocalyptic dimension of the Ishmaelites’ appearance, since Daniel’s visions about the last days were thought of as the apocalyptic prophecies *par excellence*. In addition to these, the reference to the “son of Hagar” certainly carries a pejorative allusion to Ishmaelites’ ancestry from a woman, who was a slave and had also been expelled from the community of the chosen people by Abraham.

Pseudo-Methodius’ text, following a millennium of prejudice, describes the Ishmaelites’ customs and way of living in terms of non-urban barbarians’ habits: “they were walking naked and were eating meat [from hides] and camels and were drinking blood of animals like milk.” Their, quite often stressed, origin from the desert is used to strengthen the readers’ scorn for the

⁴²⁶ XI. 1, ed. Lolos, 96.

⁴²⁷ X. 6, ed. Lolos, 94.

desert dwellers, the uncivilised barbarians, “for these tyrannically ruling barbarians are not humans but are sons of the desert and they will come for devastation.”⁴²⁸ Most of the pejorative overtones mentioned are apparent in Pseudo-Methodius’ statement “that God called their father Ishmael a wild ass;” there cannot be any misunderstanding, our author is as clear as possible: we have to deal with barbarian desert dwellers. The reference to the inhabited land (*oikoumene*) and the empty desert, apart from the symbolic connotation of antithesis between civilisation and barbarism, might have been intended as an allusion to the dwelling of people and of demons respectively; the ascetic literature is pretty eloquent on the issue of the desert as the dwelling of demons.⁴²⁹ As a result, the invasions by the Ishmaelites of the inhabited land bring destruction, devastation, and slaughter of ineffable cruelty and violence, not only for the human beings but for the whole creation. “And in the beginning of their exodus from the desert, they will spear the pregnant women, and they will tear the babies from their mothers’ bosom and kill them, and they [babies] will be food for the beasts. And they will slaughter those who minister in the sanctuary, defiling it, and they will sleep with their wives in the holy and revered places [the sanctuaries], where the mystical and bloodless sacrifice is offered ... and they will be corrupted murderers;” “they ... will be dispatched in wrath and ire on the face of the whole earth, against men and against animals and all the beasts of the earth and against forests and plants and against the bushes and every kind of fruit. And their presence will be a merciless chastisement; and four plagues will be sent before them: ruin and perdition, spoilage and desolation.”

A further attestation of this attitude might be found in the way the author uses a device to express his feelings towards the ‘sons of Ishmael.’ (Actually he follows the Byzantine rules, which copy the classical ways of expressing irony, i.e. irony is never stated as such, making it really hard for us today to single it out).⁴³⁰ The words most often used —actually, outnumbering any

⁴²⁸ XI. 17, ed. Lolos, 108.

⁴²⁹ The desert as the adobe of the demons and the spiritual fight against them is a common theme in Christian tradition of ascetic Monasticism. Starting from the *Life of Antonios*, written by Athanasius, most of the hermits’ *Lives* are full of incidents dwelling in the desert, against which the holy men fight. See Chitty, Derwas *The Desert A City*, New York 1999.

⁴³⁰ See Beck’s comments on the use of Byzantine irony in Beck, Hans-Georg *Byzantinische Jahrtausend*, Munich 1978, ch. IV.

other words— in connection with the Muslims, are the words desert (8 times) and to devastate/devastation (15 times), used to describe their place of origin and their effect on the lands and the populations they conquered, respectively. In Greek these words are *érēmos* and *erēmō/erēmōsis*, and the second pair derives etymologically from the first word, while its meaning as devastate/devastation is its metaphorical meaning. In addition to this, it has to be remembered that the same word *erēmōsis* is used in the Greek text of Daniel to refer to the eschatological sign for the end of the world, i.e. “the abomination of desolation [*erēmōsis*] standing in the holy place.”⁴³¹ It seems then, that the author uses this pun, with great pleasure I presume, to express eloquently the relationship of the Muslims’ origin and presence as a relationship of cause and result, “*tekna tes eremou eisi kai eis eremosin hexousin*” (“[they] are sons of the desert and they will come for devastation”),⁴³² and probably to hint at the religious significance of their appearance, as the forerunners of the Antichrist.

Moreover, these cruel barbarians show no respect or mercy for priests, the poor, the sick and the destitute, the widows and the orphans, or the distinguished people. “And the honour of the priests will be shifted and ... the priest will be like the laymen,” “they will have no mercy upon the poor and the destitute; and they will treat with disgrace/dishonour people of old age and they oppress the poor, and they will not have mercy on the sick and weak in might, but they will deride and laugh at wise men and at the distinguished men in politics and public affairs. And everyone will be full of silence and fear, not being able to control [anything] or say ‘what is this’ or ‘that.’ And all the inhabitants of the earth will be frightened.”⁴³³ By referring to all these categories of people, the author tries to raise sentiments of abhorrence and repulsion against Ishmaelites, who, albeit their victorious wars and conquests, do not even possess the basic qualities of civilised nations, i.e. to respect and protect the aforementioned people who are distinguished (either by their exalted position in society or by their need to be protected by the state) in the—civilised— ideological and social Byzantine context. The allusion is clear

⁴³¹ *Daniel* 12, 11.

⁴³² *Loc. cit.*

⁴³³ XI.15, ed. Lolos, 106.

enough: these cruel barbarians do not constitute a civilised and organised society, with rules to render honour to its distinguished members and/or show providence for its members in need; consequently, they cannot recognise such a presence in the conquered societies, they cannot understand the differences between civilisation and barbarism. Their deepest desire is the possession of everything they can get: “and the fish of the sea and the trees of the hills and the soil of the earth and its stones and its harvest will be theirs. And the labours and sweat of the farmers and the inheritance of the rich and the gifts offered to the holy [churches], whether of gold or silver or precious stones or bronze are, the holy and glorious vestments and the foodstuff and whatever valuable will be theirs.”⁴³⁴ This depredation of their goods in addition to the sufferings and especially the burden of heavy taxation will lead people to pronounce blessed the dead,⁴³⁵ and to sell their children;⁴³⁶ but “the barbarians will eat and drink, boasting for their victories ... dressed like bridegrooms.”⁴³⁷

While the Ishmaelites enjoyed the fruits of their labours and were led to arrogance because of their victories and successful conquests, the Christians were inevitably trying to find the reasons for their defeat and suffering. Before the seventh century the glorious victories of the Byzantines were a sign of God’s approval, but now, this certainty was tested during the successful Arab conquests. Christianity and Romanitas had come “to depend on each other in a sort of religio-historical tautology: imperial victory demonstrated Christianity’s power, efficacy, and legitimacy; Christ’s demonstrated power through victory proved his love for his chosen empire and its emperor.”⁴³⁸ While military victory was an assertion of Christ’s favour, defeat, on the other hand, was perceived as divine chastisement;⁴³⁹ in the first half of the seventh century, Antiochus Monachus, writing about the fall of Jerusalem to the Persians, had the devil saying to Christians: “For you are hated by him and are his enemies, not his friends; for did he not aid your

⁴³⁴ XI.14, ed. Lolos, 104.

⁴³⁵ XI. 17, ed. Lolos, 108.

⁴³⁶ XIII. 4, ed. Lolos, 118.

⁴³⁷ XIII. 6, ed. Lolos, 118-120.

⁴³⁸ Olster, David “Byzantine Apocalypses” in McGinn, Bernard *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 2, Continuum, New York 1999, 54.

⁴³⁹ Olster, “Byzantine Apocalypses,” 58-59.

enemies and strengthen them more than you, and strip you of his armour and take away from you his protection?”⁴⁴⁰

Pseudo-Methodius’ answer to the agonising question of the Christians is that all this suffering is God’s chastisement: “The Lord says to Israel through Moses, ‘Not because the Lord God loves you does he lead you into the promised land to settle it, but on account of the sins of those who dwell there.’ Likewise for the sons of Ishmael, the Lord God does not give them the power to rule the lands of the Christians because he loves them, but on account of the sinfulness abounding among the Christians, the like of which have not been committed, nor is it going to be committed in all the generations of the earth ... because of this, God delivered them to the hands of the barbarians.”⁴⁴¹ (It is interesting to note here that both Jews and Muslims are presented as instruments of God’s wrath and punishment). The Muslims are not presented *per se*, but as the negative consequence of the Romans’ behaviour; their victories are not due to their own military virtues but they are a result of God’s permission to defeat the Romans. The Muslims do not possess an existence of their own but they are conceived only as an instrument, a mechanism in God’s hands to punish his chosen people when they go astray. The text is careful to affirm that the victories of the Muslims had no relationship to God’s favour but were merely God’s tool to express his wrath and punish the Romans for their sins (predominantly sexual, and more specifically homosexual ones)⁴⁴² and consequently to lead them to repentance.

Pseudo-Methodius’ answers provide his contemporaries with a cyclical scheme of sin, repentance, and restoration as an explanation of the Christian Roman defeat.⁴⁴³ The ultimate source of “these naïve views about the irreversibility of the historical process, these moralist explanations of historical events as divine retribution for human sin, and his somewhat mechanistic pattern of military success breeding excessive self-confidence and blasphemy,”⁴⁴⁴ as Alexander pointed out, is the Old Testament (e.g. the

⁴⁴⁰ Antiochus Monachus, *La prise de Jerusalem par les Perses*, ed. G. Garitte, CSCO 203, Louvain 1952, 13.65.

⁴⁴¹ XI. 5, ed. Lolos, 98, (trans. by Olster, “Byzantine Apocalypses,” 63).

⁴⁴² XI. 6-7, ed. Lolos, 98-100.

⁴⁴³ Cf. Olster, “Byzantine Apocalypses,” 63.

⁴⁴⁴ Alexander, “Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources,” 1009.

book of Judges), and all these features are faint echoes of Jewish prophecy and apocalypticism.

The restoration of the Christians and the final defeat of the Ishmaelites will come by the king of the Greeks (the theme of the last emperor that Pseudo-Methodius introduced, and was going to prove long lasting both in the East and the West⁴⁴⁵). The entrance of the Greek emperor in the scene is the immediate response to the arrogant blasphemy of the Ishmaelites “Christians have no deliverance from our hands.”⁴⁴⁶ This arrogant statement carries both religious and political connotations, since “military defeat was evidence of God’s condemnation and the weakness of the loser’s deity was a classical idea with a long history,”⁴⁴⁷ but, on the other hand, defeat and conquests mean lack of a strong political and military leadership. Although the religious importance of such an argument was pre-eminent in people’s minds and might have prevailed in some of their discussions and subsequent decisions,⁴⁴⁸ it is the connection of both political and religious factors that would have had the greatest impact on the average Byzantine. And this is hardly surprising, since empire and religion had been inseparable in Roman-Byzantine political rhetoric and thought, and the emperor was ruling the *oikoumene* by a god-given power, being also an image of God Almighty.⁴⁴⁹ Consequently, the answer had to comply with both connotations: “and there will arise against them a king of the Greeks, namely Romans, with great wrath and will awake as a man from his sleep who had been drinking wine, whom the men considered as dead and totally useless.”⁴⁵⁰ The Saviour will be the Byzantine emperor—actually the only Christian ruler who can respond in an ecumenical way, on behalf of the suffering Christians—and he has Christological features (of an eschatological character). The arising Greek emperor is the mighty Lord of the Psalms,⁴⁵¹ at whom our author hints. The sleeping king, who awakens when everyone thought of him as dead, is an allusion, an

⁴⁴⁵ See Alexander, “The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition,” 151-184.

⁴⁴⁶ XIII. 6, ed. Lolos, 120.

⁴⁴⁷ Olster, “Byzantine Apocalypses,” 56-57.

⁴⁴⁸ The case of the anti-Jewish treatises on this topic is characteristic, see previous chapter.

⁴⁴⁹ For a detailed analysis, see Ahrweiler, Hélène *L'idéologie politique de l'empire byzantin*, Paris 1975; and Runciman, Steven *The Byzantine Theocracy*, Cambridge 1977.

⁴⁵⁰ XIII. 11, ed. Lolos, 122-124.

⁴⁵¹ *Ps.*, 77, 65.

unmistakable parallel image of Christ's resurrection, and his glorious victory over death and Satan. The author's use of symbolic and typological exegesis implies this interpretation as, "very often his words refer at the same time to a historical and a Biblical or theological reality, using typological models and Biblical symbolic speech to link both levels."⁴⁵²

The author, in order to inspire the Romans with courage and hope, reminds his readers of a previous invasion of the Ishmaelites (though the people mentioned were the Biblical Midianites⁴⁵³), which was successfully confronted by Judge Gideon, who functions as a prophetic archetype of the Messiah (or the last king) in the way of *typos-antitypos* presentation of Patristic theology.⁴⁵⁴ "... And they [Ishmael's sons] left from the desert of Yethrib and they came to the inhabited land and fought with the kings of nations. And they devastated them· and they captured the kingdoms of the nations, that were in the promised land. And the earth was full of them and their camps. They were like the locusts ... And when the sons of Ishmael conquered all the earth and they ravaged its cities and towns and they dominated over all the islands, then they constructed for themselves boats and, by using them like birds, they flew over the waters of the sea. And floating they went to the lands of the West, up to great Rome ... and beyond Rome. And they dominated the earth for sixty years and had done to it whatever they wished ... and since they viewed themselves as the dominants over all, their heart rose to haughtiness ... God ... delivered them [the Israelites] from those [the sons of Ishmael] through Gideon· and Israel was freed from the slavery of the sons of Ishmael. Because this Gideon destroyed their camps; and expelled and drove them out of the inhabited land and chased them into the desert of Yethrib, where they originated from."⁴⁵⁵

(Concerning the historicity of this incident, Alexander comments: "the Syriac text knew of an archetypal invasion of Israel by Midianites at the time

⁴⁵² Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam," 153.

⁴⁵³ Our author deliberately alludes to the Biblical reference (Gen. xxxvii.25-28, xxv.1-2) on Midianites as Ishmaelites, in order to achieve his purpose.

⁴⁵⁴ The case where an incident or a figure from the Old Testament is seen as a prophetic depiction of things happening to the New Testament. E.g. the Jewish Passover, a passage from slavery to freedom is seen as a sign of the Christian Easter, a passage from death to life; or the adventures of prophet Jonas seen as a sign of Christ's death and resurrection.

⁴⁵⁵ V. 2-7, ed. Lolos, 64-68.

of the Hebrew Judges and mentioned their four leaders in accordance with the Old Testament, Oreb and Zeeb, Zebel and Zalmunna (Judg. 8). Several manuscripts of the Greek translation, however, call these four Midianite leaders ‘sons of Umayya,’ obviously because the translator believed that Pseudo-Methodius’ prophecy had found its fulfilment at the time of the Umayyad rulers of Damascus.”⁴⁵⁶

The reference to the raids of the Arabs, during the alleged period of Ishmael’s life, is an attempt to remind the audience that the enemies are already known from the past and have been defeated before, but with divine help and under the leadership of a chosen pious person, i.e. Gideon. On the other hand, such a concept of history, on the part of the author, implicitly denies defeatism, and collaboration with the Ishmaelites. (And from this point of view, it greatly differs from similar paraenetic texts, which only suggest endurance and perseverance, even from St. John’s *Apocalypse*.) The profound reason for such an historical interpretation and a polemical attitude towards the Muslims was obviously the Syrian author’s urge to prevent apostasy and conversion to the new monotheistic belief. Reinink, writing about the Syriac original, put it succinctly and clearly: “The main problem for ps.-Methodius is in fact the danger of voluntary apostasy by members of his own Church.”⁴⁵⁷ And quite rightly: “thus also in the time of the falling away and of the chastisement of the sons of Ishmael, few will be left over who are true Christians, as Our Saviour said in the Holy Gospels ... then, he says, the multitude will deny the true faith, and the life-giving Cross and the holy sacraments. And without compulsion or punishment or blows they will deny Christ and will follow the apostates ... All those who are weak in the faith will be made manifest and they will voluntarily separate themselves from the holy churches ...”⁴⁵⁸ Hence, it seems that it is against the problem of conversions that the Syrian author concentrated all his energy and the dramatic overtones of his apocalypse. But now a new question arises: although such a purpose could have been aimed (with the circulation of the

⁴⁵⁶ Alexander, “Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources,” 1007.

⁴⁵⁷ Reinink, “Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam,” 159; Cf. also Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, 32; Kaegi, Walter Emil Jr. “Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest,” *Church History* 38 (1969), 145.

⁴⁵⁸ XII, 2-3; XII, 6.

Syriac original) at the occupied eastern areas, how valid might it have been for a Byzantine audience? Is still the Greek translation's main purpose to prevent conversions (offering simultaneously consolation and hope to the Christians)?

The fear of conversions and deliberate apostasy cannot be applicable inside the territory of the Byzantine Empire, unless the text, at an early stage, was addressed to populations living in the areas close to the borders, where the discussions and the challenge could have been strong and high. Therefore, I think that we cannot seriously suggest that the Greek text served such a purpose anymore, or is mainly occupied by this concern. It seems more plausible to suggest that its use in the Byzantine environment was targeted towards two other goals: firstly, to console and to inspire endurance in the people, with the hope of the final retribution ("And why does God allow the faithful to undergo these trials? Why, so that the faithful will appear and the unfaithful will be made manifest, the wheat separated from the chaff; for this time is a fire of trial ... so that the chosen will be manifest ... and he that endure to the end shall be saved").⁴⁵⁹ And secondly, by strengthening Christians' faith in Christ's power, to show Christ's special relationship with the Roman-Byzantine Empire. There is only one legitimate way of interpreting the future and history: The Roman-Byzantine Empire is the fourth and last kingdom of Daniel's prophecies, it is the one that will face the powers of the Antichrist and, in the end, will deliver its power to God from whom it has received it.⁴⁶⁰ Indicative of this perspective of interpreting the future, as has been rightly mentioned, is the fact that the author never uses the term 'kingship' or 'king' for the Ishmaelites.⁴⁶¹ After all, the Roman/Byzantine Empire is the only kingdom that can vouchsafe for the lives and souls of the faithful until the Second Coming and the Kingdom of God, since it has been its image on earth; the Byzantine Empire will last to the final consummation (*synteleia*).⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁹ XII.4-5, ed. Lolos, 118, (trans. by Olster, "Byzantine Apocalypses," 61).

⁴⁶⁰ "And the king of the Romans will go up on Golgotha ... and will hand over his kingship to God the Father," XIV, ed. Lolos, 132.

⁴⁶¹ About the Syriac original, see Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam," 158.

⁴⁶² Cf. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 23.

Therefore, it seems that the apocalypses might have played a crucial role in the consolidation of the imperial ideology, which was formed during that period, by strengthening the belief in the eschatological end of the empire and also by filling the practical and real gap between reality (defeats) and ideal (invincibility of the empire).⁴⁶³ Through apocalypses, Romanitas and Christianity are bound together till the end of the world. And, needless to say, this bond was further solidified and enforced by its juxtaposition against a horribly and frightfully depicted enemy. Thus, the messages, purposes and priorities of a Syriac concept of history in response to the rise of Islam,⁴⁶⁴ continued to live in their transfer into Byzantine-Greek context but in another form, enhanced by new meanings, connected with other ideological frameworks, still serving the same duty: to offer interpretational tools to the emergent Muslim challenge and inspire hope and faith to the people.

Apart from such developments, it seems that something deeper might have happened in the field of impressions and allusions, the significance of which might escape us today; and this is connected to the way of presentation of the Ishmaelites' entrance in the historical scene. In the text, the eruption of the Ishmaelites marks the opening of the Last Day's drama. And following apocalyptic patterns, established by John's *Apocalypse*, the text says that "four plagues will be sent before them: ruin and perdition, spoilage and desolation." In addition, it has been also emphasised that, in Ps.-Methodius' conception of history, Byzantium-New Rome had replaced Rome as Daniel's fourth kingdom,⁴⁶⁵ the last one that would restrain the coming of the Antichrist. The impact of these allusions and phrases on the average Byzantine is hard to reconstruct, but considering their thought-world, the Biblical foundations of their culture, and their eschatological view of history, we might suggest that in the use of these patterns and phrases, the average Byzantine could justifiably associate the Ishmaelites' invasions with the portents of the hour; a sign that the world would soon come to its end, and the Antichrist was on his way to destroy the faithful. This might have effected the conception of the Ishmaelites as the Antichrist's forerunners, an idea that may

⁴⁶³ Cf. Olster, "Byzantine Apocalypses," 60.

⁴⁶⁴ Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam," 186.

⁴⁶⁵ McGinn, *Visions of the End*, 71; Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam," 158.

lie as a fundamental bias for the construction of the Byzantine understanding of the religious identity of the Muslims.⁴⁶⁶ It might further have inspired hatred and resistance among the Christians to become a part of the Antichrist's army. In this connection, it should be noted that, to my knowledge, Muḥammad has never been called the Antichrist; he is always considered to be the forerunner of the Antichrist. The Byzantines, by connecting the advance of the Muslims with the coming of the Antichrist and by denying them the status of a new kingdom, formed the basic conception of the Muslims as enemies, in both the religious and political field. Of course, such reactions were only possible in the seventh-eighth century, since, after that time, the Byzantines realised that the Muslims were meant to stay forever. The basic biases, however, which emerged during that period, seem to persist through later periods and to define the Byzantine constituents for the perception of the Muslims.

One last remark should be added, concerning the origin of the text. It could be said that the translated Greek text tells us more about the original one's attitudes than about its own. This is only partly right because, the omissions, changes, corrections, and interpolations induced to the Greek text, as well as its wide diffusion, through several redactions and copies, as Alexander has clearly shown, reflect specific Greek-Byzantine concerns and interests.⁴⁶⁷ On the other hand, the Byzantines themselves felt the impact of the conquests and Muslim rule on their own territories, and they even had to face the Muslim threat just in front of their capital (sieges of Constantinople); as a result, they could form their own perceptions from their own experiences or they could freely choose how to express them. What seems to have happened with the Greek translation of a Syriac apocalypse is the fact that the former successfully presented and expressed the Byzantines' fears, hopes and ideas and, consequently, it was adopted and given a new and prolonged life.

In any case, the most interesting aspect of Ps-Methodius' Apocalypse is that a Syriac text, written for a certain community of a certain period, achieved such popularity and publicity, as its numerous redactions,

⁴⁶⁶ But this needs further examination, as well as the political use of the Antichrist: something that will be done in the analysis of the polemical literature.

⁴⁶⁷ See Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 54-60.

translations, and circulations (up until the nineteenth century) suggest. In fact, the main apocalyptic themes, patterns, motifs, and ideas, that this text introduced, were destined to survive all through the Byzantine period and beyond. The reasons for this success are beyond the limits of this study, but it has to be stressed that the influence it exercised upon the following apocalyptic texts is paradigmatic. The dependency of the later Apocalypses on the Pseudo-Methodius Apocalypse is apparent through their text, language, themes and the interpretational scheme they employ, although they add new elements and ideas from their own historical time and cultural context.

3. 3. Wars of propaganda amidst apocalyptic crisis

‘Abd al-Malik is not only held responsible for the symbolic appropriation of the erstwhile Christian —and Byzantine— territories but also for his efforts to make apparent and distinct a new religio-political entity in the same territories, now under Muslim rule, through Arabisation and Islamisation. Alongside his fiscal and administrative changes, the most significant —and suggestive of his attitudes— is his monetary reforms. According to an apocalyptic text, from Coptic Egypt at this time, we are ‘foretold’ that “first, that nation [the Arabs] will destroy the gold on which there is the image of the Cross of the Lord our God in order to make all the countries under its rule mint their own gold with the name of the beast written on it, the number of whose name is 666.”⁴⁶⁸ The text mentions the second of ‘Abd al-Malik’s monetary reforms of AH 77/696. Around 691-692, ‘Abd al-Malik started to change the standard Byzantine coinage, which until then had also been used in the Caliphate. During that first period, he tried, by effacing the cross of the Byzantine *solidus*, to introduce motifs and designs thoroughly Islamic, like the caliph holding a sword and a spear in a prayer niche. In the second phase of this reform, he introduced a clearly epigraphic, non-figural coinage, which, by the exclusive use of Arabic, manifested the Muslim monotheistic creed “There is no God but Allah and Muḥammad is his Messenger.” Through his

⁴⁶⁸ *Ps. Athanasius* apocalypse (according to Hoyland, its *terminem ante quem* is 744) in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 283.

monetary reforms, he not only abandoned Byzantine coinage by successfully introducing a new one, but simultaneously openly manifested and propagated the new Islamic faith.⁴⁶⁹

This monetary reform did not pass unnoticed by the Byzantines. Theophanes in year 690/691 says that “Justinian ... refused to accept the minted coin that had been sent by Abimelech because it was of a new kind that had never been used before ... Abimelech ... feigned ... that Justinian should accept his currency, seeing that the Arabs could not suffer the Roman imprint on their new currency.”⁴⁷⁰ However, the most important Byzantine response to this change came via the same, religious or imperial, propaganda, i.e. the coinage. Justinian II, in 692, changed Byzantine coinage and remarkably, for the first time, put the image of Christ on it. While he put Christ’s bust on the obverse side of the coin, he removed the emperor’s portrait on the reverse side where it would remain, with a few exceptions, until the end of the empire; as we know, this move had taken place a century before on seals.⁴⁷¹ Christ was given the title *Rex Regnantium* (King of the Rulers), while Justinian is presented as *Servus Christi*.⁴⁷² The message was clear: Christ is the ruler of the world and Justinian (or the Byzantine emperor) his legitimate sovereign over the Christian *oikoumene*, including the Muslim

⁴⁶⁹ See Grierson, “Monetary Reforms of ‘Abd al-Malik: Their Metrological Basis and Their Financial Repercussions,” *JESHO* 3 (1960), 241-264; Hawting, *The First Dynasty*, 64-65; and Robinson, Chase *‘Abd al-Malik*, Oxford 2005, 73-75.

⁴⁷⁰ Theophanes, 365.

⁴⁷¹ “On the seals of his first reign Justinian reverted to the obverse image of the Mother of God holding Christ before her that was altered by his father, except one type on which she holds Christ in her left arm. In the first reign, there are two reverse types: first, a bust of the emperor holding a *globus cruciger*, and second, a full-length representation holding a cross potent on three steps,” from: Dumbarton Oaks, Recourses, Seals, *God’s Regent on earth: A Thousand Years of Byzantine Imperial Seals*. Available from: <http://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/gods-regents-on-earth-a-thousand-years-of-byzantine-imperial-seals/rulers-of-byzantium/justinian-ii-687201395>. [30 August 2015]. See also Zacos, G. & Vegler, A. *Byzantine Lead Seals*, 1, Basel 1972, no. 29. It should also be mentioned that the image of Christ had the Cross behind his head, and the emperor was wearing a crown with a cross and carrying a Cross in his hand; it seems that this imagery was primarily directed against the Muslims who denied the Cross.

⁴⁷² For a discussion on the significance of this monetary change, see Head, Constance *Justinian*, 1972, Madison, Milwaukee & London, 45-58; Breckenridge, James Douglas *The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II (685-695, 705-711 A.D.)*, New York 1959, 69-77; and Kaplony, Andreas *Konstantinopel und Damaskus: Gesandtschaften und Verträge zwischen Kaisern und Kalifen 639-750: Untersuchungen zum Gewohnheits-Völkerrecht und zur interkulturellen Diplomatie*, Berlin 1996, 127-160.

territories. The crucial point in this ideological war of propaganda⁴⁷³ is the phrase *Servus Christi*, by which Justinian attempted to respond to the Muslim challenge. ‘Abd al-Malik in Arabic means Servant of the King,⁴⁷⁴ and Justinian’s eloquent pun should not be overlooked: the only King is Christ, and His only true Servant is Justinian (the Byzantine emperor). Justinian’s action should be seen in combination with his policies against the Muslims: he broke the truce that his father had signed between Byzantium and the Caliphate, and interestingly enough he named the army of the Slavs that raised up against the Muslims, as the Chosen people.⁴⁷⁵

Several Byzantinists, following Breckenridge’s arguments for the date of Justinian’s monetary reform,⁴⁷⁶ consider ‘Abd al-Malik’s coinage change as a reaction to Justinian’s claims and ambitions, and see Justinian’s reform as connected to inter-Christian and imperial, ideological issues.⁴⁷⁷ Bates though, has persuasively argued that there is nothing decisive and conclusive about Breckenridge’s suggestion that the Justinianic reform antedates that of ‘Abd al-Malik; and as a result, Breckenridge’s view “is only a plausible hypothesis resting on several speculations, and not a fixed datum.”⁴⁷⁸ Taking into consideration the historical circumstances, and Justinian’s aggressive policies against ‘Abd al-Malik, I think that the minting of this new coinage, and the inscription on it, might have been the first ideological Byzantine response to ‘Abd al-Malik’s declaration of an Islamic monotheistic faith. (The fact that the later Byzantine emperors kept the bust of Christ on the coinage, but not the title *Servus Christi*, might indicate this particular aim, which was pursued

⁴⁷³ André Grabar aptly characterized it as a “guerre par les images,” Grabar, André *L’iconoclisme byzantin: Le dossier archéologique*, Paris 1957, 59.

⁴⁷⁴ As far as I know, he is mentioned once as *Anaktodoulos* in *The Sixty Martyrs of Jerusalem*, see Papadopoulos-Kerameus, A. *Pravoslavnyi Palestinskij Sbornik* 12 (1892), 3, § 3.

⁴⁷⁵ Theophanes, 366; Nicephorus, 95 (§ 38). On the use of the phrase *Chosen people*, by Justinian II, see Anagnostakis, Ilias “Περὶ τοῦ τοῦ λαοῦ” in *Οἱ σκοτεινοὶ αἰῶνες τοῦ Βυζαντίου* (7^{ος}–9^{ος} αι.), Athens 2001, 325–346.

⁴⁷⁶ See Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography*.

⁴⁷⁷ See article “‘Abd al-Malik” in *ODB*; Olster, David “Ideological Transformation and the Evolution of Imperial Presentation in the Wake of Islam’s Victory” in Grypeou, Emmanouela, Swanson, Mark & Thomas, David (eds) *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, Leiden 2006, 68–69. Olster suggests that “the emperor ... was presented not only as Christ’s co-emperor, but also employed a legend that had episcopal connotations,” 69. See also Angold, Michael *Byzantium: The Bridge from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, New York 2001, 57, where he considers it as “the clearest statement of Byzantine imperial ideology as it had developed since the sixth century.”

⁴⁷⁸ See Bates, Michael “History, Geography and Numismatics in the First Century of Islamic Coinage,” *Revue Suisse de Numismatique* 65 (1986), 253.

by Justinian II). Notwithstanding the date difficulties that the coinage of this period presents,⁴⁷⁹ it appears that Mu‘āwiya was the first who had already attempted to change Byzantine coinage. This was reported by the so-called *Maronite Chronicle*: “In AG 971 [661 AD], Constans 18th year, many Arabs gathered in Jerusalem and made Mu‘āwiya king... In July of the same year the emirs and many Arabs gathered and proffered their right hand to Mu‘āwiya... He also minted gold and silver, but it was not accepted, because it had no cross on it.”⁴⁸⁰ Recent research seems to support and corroborate this testimony.⁴⁸¹ Moreover, the transformation process of the Caliphate was already apparent, with the construction of the Dome of the Rock; ‘Abd al-Malik’s intensions were obviously under way much earlier than Justinian’s monetary reform. Be this as it may, the incident clearly shows that both rulers were mutually aware of their growing religious and political aspirations and oppositions, and they were willing to express them openly from this point forward. It would not be long time until this war of propaganda will be transformed into a military clash for the domination of the *oikoumene*, in front of Constantinople.

3. 4. Constantinople in the apocalyptic tradition

As previously stated, *Ps.-Methodius’* Apocalypse exercised a great influence upon the two other apocalyptic texts that received great popularity, i.e. the *Visions of Daniel* and Andreas Salos’ Apocalypse. Both of them present the theme of the ‘Last Emperor,’ found in *Ps.-Methodius’* work, while the latter also uses the theme of Alexander the Great’s unleashing of the ‘filthy nations.’ These texts also direct their attention to the coming of the Antichrist and put an emphasis on the fate of Constantinople (which was

⁴⁷⁹ See Bates, “History, Geography and Numismatics in the First Century of Islamic Coinage,” 231f.; Oddy, Andrew “Whither Arab-Byzantine numismatics? A review of fifty years’ research,” *BMGS* 28 (2004), 121-152; and Foss, “A Syrian coinage of Mu‘āwiya,” 353-365.

⁴⁸⁰ Palmer, *The Seventh Century*, 31-32.

⁴⁸¹ See Foss, “A Syrian coinage of Mu‘āwiya,” 353-365.

considered as the ‘New Jerusalem’ from the sixth century onwards)⁴⁸² during the approaching apocalyptic future. Their main interest for this study lies in the expression of eschatological expectancies and anxieties, which point to the fall of Constantinople.

Although the text of *Visions of Daniel*, in its present form, was assigned by its editor to ca. 802, Mango persuasively argued that its first version was written at the beginning of Leo III’s reign.⁴⁸³ Apart from the text’s mention of the siege of Constantinople, in the winter of 716-717, the author’s modelling of the last king is based upon Leo’s III historical figure. The text says that the last king originates from “the inner country of the Persian and Syrian nations,” and his name begins with ‘K’ (Leo’s baptismal name was Konon). Needless to say, that the text in its present form is the product of several later redactions. What is of particular interest for this study is the atmosphere of eschatological fear of the Arab attacks and especially their siege of Constantinople: “And the bramble holding the sons of Hagar will dry up, and the nations and the three sons of Hagar will come out of Babylon the great; and the one of them is called Wales, the other Axiaphar and the third Morphosar. And Ishmael ... will put his camp in Chalcedon opposite Byzantium ... And all these will slaughter a multitude of Romans and they will gather towards the sea and the number of that nation is myriad myriads and thousand thousands and there are other nations endless and innumerable. And Ishmael will cry out in a loud voice, boasting and saying: Where is the God of the Romans? There is no one to help them; they are really defeated”⁴⁸⁴ (1, 2-4; 3, 1-5).

The date of composition of Andreas Salos’ Apocalypse is not only difficult to define (due to the lack of *vaticinia ex eventu*) but it has created a dispute between two leading Byzantinists, whether it was the seventh or the

⁴⁸² This occasional reference functioned mainly as a metaphor for the increasing sacredness of the city from the sixth century, and not as a commonly used appellation, such as “New Rome”. The identification of Constantinople with Jerusalem is firstly met in the *Life of Daniel the Stylite*, a text of c. 500 AD. See Fenster, Erwin, *Laudes Constantinopolitanae*, *Miscellanea Byzantina Monacensia* 19, Munich 1968, 121; Dagron, Gilbert, *Naissance d’une capitale: Constantinople et ses institutions de 330 à 451*, Paris 1984, 408-409; Magdalino, “The History of the Future,” 11-12.

⁴⁸³ Mango, “Life of St. Andrew the Fool,” 310-313; followed by Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 298-299.

⁴⁸⁴ *Die griechische Daniel Diegese: Eine altkirchliche Apokalypse*, (ed. by Berger, Klaus), *Studia Post-Biblica*, 27, Leiden 1976, 12.

tenth century.⁴⁸⁵ This Apocalypse is embodied in the *Life of St. Andrew*, a Fool for Christ saint, and it is mainly preoccupied with the end of the world, discussing the succession of eschatological emperors and the fate of Constantinople, which is destined to sink —bar one column in the forum— until the appearance of the Antichrist. At the beginning of the text there is a brief reference to the Arabs, who will be defeated without great trouble: “Therefore he [the emperor] will turn his face toward the east and humble the sons of Hagar. For the Lord will be angry with them because of their blasphemy and because their fruit is of Sodom’s gall and Gomorrah’s bitterness. Therefore, he will strike the emperor of the Romans and rouse him against them and he will destroy them and kill their children with fire, and those who have been given into his hands will be handed over to violent torment ... He will have great zeal and pursue the Jews, and in this city you will find no Ishmaelite”⁴⁸⁶ (856A-856C). As it has been rightly suggested, in spite of this mention, there is an obvious lack of anxiety about an Arab military threat, something that might suggest a date of composition after 740, when Leo III and his son routed Muslim forces in Asia Minor and civil war broke out among the Muslims.⁴⁸⁷ It is evident that for the author of this text the Arab presence is not seen as a great threat and does not call for a lengthier or more detailed report; however, the Arabs are still considered the main enemy of the Byzantine state. Having said this, it should be also noted that his emphasis on Constantinople and its imminent disaster, apart from suggesting “a Byzantium that has accepted and grown accustomed to its narrower horizons,”⁴⁸⁸ seems to echo long-established popular anxieties and fears for the fate of the capital even after the failed siege of Constantinople in 718.

⁴⁸⁵ While the editor of the text Rydén supports the idea that the Apocalypse dates from the tenth century, Mango refutes this view suggesting an earlier date, i.e. the seventh century. For this dispute see the relevant texts: Rydén, Lennart “The Date of the ‘Life of Andreas Salos’,” *DOP* 32 (1978), 127-155; Mango, Cyril “The Life of St. Andrew the Fool Reconsidered” in *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Slavi II (Miscellanea A. Pertusi II, Bologna 1982)*, now in idem, *Byzantium and Its Image*, Variorum Reprints, London 1984; Rydén, Lennart “The Life of St Basil the Younger and the Date of the Life of St Andreas Salos,” *Okeanos. Essays presented to Ihor Ševčenko on his Sixtieth Birthday* (=Harvard Ukrainian Studies, 7), Cambridge Mass. 1983, 568-586.

⁴⁸⁶ Trans. by Rydén, Lennart “The Andreas Salos Apocalypse. Greek Text, Translation, and Commentary,” *DOP* 28 (1974), 216.

⁴⁸⁷ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 306-307.

⁴⁸⁸ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 307.

The great importance of the apocalyptic works (as their wide diffusion indicates) lies in their popular acceptance. They allow us to hint at and sketch the possible popular responses to the fundamental and dramatic dislocation that the Arab conquests brought upon Byzantine society.⁴⁸⁹ They offered a comforting answer to the impending question of the validity of their faith and the destiny of their empire, connecting the formal political ideology—which related the Roman Empire to God—with the belief that the empire was the fourth and last kingdom of Daniel’s prophetic utterance, which was destined to win a glorious victory over the then prevailing enemy, the Arabs;⁴⁹⁰ thus, leading the world to the eschatological peace that the last emperor will restore by submitting his royal insignia to God upon Golgotha.⁴⁹¹ By doing this, the popular feeling and sentiment not only found an explanation for the befallen misfortunes but it also enhanced the imperial ideology of the Byzantine state through new conceptions and interpretations of historical calamities. Additionally, as the development of this literature shows, the impact of the Arab conquests exercised such a great influence upon Byzantine consciousness that it led the Byzantines to interpret them as one of the major portents of the hour, the consummation of the world and the advent of Antichrist. Consequently, it seems that they were driven to consider the Muslims as the enemy *per se* and their presence as an alerting and symbolic sign of the approaching cosmic fulfilment. Needless to say, that such an attitude does not lead to a balanced and cognisant attitude towards the new neighbour-enemy, because a real knowledge of them was probably considered futile and useless, since the appearance of Muslims marked something deeper and more important than the usual phenomenon of an enemy attacking the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, Byzantium, by placing such a great emphasis on the Muslim presence, put itself into a trap and it “never really got over the fact that the world did not end with the Arab conquests.”⁴⁹² The world was changing in many respects, and this was evident especially after the early eighth century; something that slowly led to the postponement of the End

⁴⁸⁹ Haldon, *Byzantium*, 364.

⁴⁹⁰ Cf. Haldon, *Byzantium*, 367-368 and Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reicheschatologie*, 54-55, 72.

⁴⁹¹ Reinink, “Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam,” 186-187.

⁴⁹² Magdalino, “The History of the Future,” 31.

indefinitely and to the ‘moderation’ of Christian perceptions towards Muslims, by putting them at the back of the stage and not at the forefront of eschatological concerns, due to lack of fear from an impending threat. Finally, as it has been pointed out “the Byzantine vision of the future survived without a major crisis of conscience because it did not over-systematise, by attempting to iron out contradictions or push definitions to their logical conclusion.”⁴⁹³

3. 5. Muslim apocalyptic and eschatological expectations

While the Christians were articulating apocalyptic answers to their agonising questions, it is worth noting that the Muslims on the other hand were also generating apocalyptic narratives, although for completely different reasons.⁴⁹⁴ The recent research of Suliman Bashear and David Cook, on apocalyptic references inside the Muslim tradition, revealed a vast amount of Muslim apocalyptic and eschatological material lying in the Arabic sources, especially in al-Nu‘aym.⁴⁹⁵ In contradiction though to the Christian apocalyptic texts, Muslim apocalypticism is transmitted in the form of *ḥadīth*, and as a result, is scattered throughout in several works. David Cook offers the following definition for apocalypticism in the Muslim context: “Muslim apocalyptic is a genre of literature presented in the form of a *ḥadīth* purporting to convey information about the period of time leading up to the end of the world, or to give the impression that the historical events occurring in the contemporary present are an integral part of this finale.”⁴⁹⁶ Such a definition almost coincides with the meaning of the Christian apocalypticism, thus making obvious their common monotheistic background and set of ideas,

⁴⁹³ Magdalino, “The History of the Future,” 32.

⁴⁹⁴ It has to be noted here that the first scholars who have drawn our attention to this apocalyptic material concerning the conquest of Constantinople, is Vasiliev, “Medieval Ideas of the End of the World,” and Canard, Marius “Les expéditions des Arabes contre Constantinople dans l’histoire et dans la légende,” *JA* 208 (1926), 61–121, now in idem, *Byzance et les musulmans du Proche Orient*, London 1973.

⁴⁹⁵ Bashear, Suliman “Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars: A Review,” *JRAS* (3rd series) 1, 1991, 173–207, now in Bonner, Michael (ed.) *Arab-Byzantine Relations in Early Islamic Times*, Aldershot 2004, 7; Cook, David *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, Princeton N.J. 2002. As a result, this part of the thesis is heavily depended upon their work and study.

⁴⁹⁶ Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 1, n. 2.

upon which the apocalyptic genre developed. Furthermore, the parallel study of the Christian and Muslim apocalypticism surprisingly reveals that at certain times for both Muslims and Christians the target seems to be the same, although the motives and the reasons for achieving it are quite different.⁴⁹⁷ Since the pattern of the history of salvation (*heilsgeschichte*) they both follow is the same, it is quite reasonable that the eschatological finale of the consummation of the world is anticipated by Christians and Muslims alike. The interpretation though of God's punishment and wrath, as well as the portents of the hour and who are God's elected people of course differ, due to opposing faiths and beliefs.

David Cook argued that the interactions between Christians, Jews and Muslims, resulted in common themes and ideas about the Muslim apocalypticism, such as the last king, Daniel's pattern of the cycle of weeks, or the Biblical frame on certain of this apocalyptic material, among others.⁴⁹⁸ Leaving aside the disagreements between different methodological approaches, expressed by Cook against Bashear's acceptance of Paul Alexander's principles for the interpretation of the apocalypticism,⁴⁹⁹ consideration will be given to specific material concerning our study. Among the extended *corpus* of the Muslim apocalypticism a distinct group of references belongs to the *malāḥim* eschatological cycle. According to Bashear, Madelung, and Michael Cook, this material can be safely dated to the early Umayyad era, from the late seventh and early eighth century, and reflects the apocalyptic speculations as well as the historical concerns of Muslims of that period.⁵⁰⁰ Needless to say that such works, very often being products of redactions and reconstructions, are accompanied by difficulties on extracting authentic and precise historical references. Suffice for the purview of this study though, is the fact that they come from the early Umayyad period and they express eschatological anxieties and expectations against Byzantium and the capture of Constantinople.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁷ Cf. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 5-6.

⁴⁹⁸ Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, esp. 34-79.

⁴⁹⁹ For which see Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 33-34.

⁵⁰⁰ See Bashear, "Apocalyptic and Other Materials," 173, and n. 6, 206.

⁵⁰¹ See also el Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs*, Cambridge 2004, 62-70.

“Arabic lexicographies define ‘*malḥama*’ as a term denoting the general, fierce war with much killing and many atrocities. In Muslim eschatology the ‘*malāḥim*’ are presented as the final wars of trial, being part of the pre-messianic events towards the end of the world. As such, the ‘*malāḥim*’ were mostly connected with the wars against Byzantium. This connection is so exclusive that ‘*malāḥim*’ became in *ḥadīth* compilations almost synonymous with these wars.”⁵⁰² A main concern that is evident in this *corpus* are Muslim anxieties and fears against a Byzantine reconquest of Syria. As a result, there is an abundance of mentions that express their fear of Byzantine invasions, especially coastal attacks on Syrian cities.⁵⁰³ These highly antagonistic and eschatological wars are conceived as the portents of the hour, and they announce the imminent end of the world. “Although Byzantium figures as the main enemy of Islam, our apocalyptic material leaves no doubt that the struggle over Syria would be an all-out one with the whole Christian world.”⁵⁰⁴ In one such reference, the Prophet is quoted as saying that Persia seems not to pose any real threat for the Muslims anymore: “Persia is (only a matter of) one or two thrusts and no Persia will ever be after that. But the Byzantines with the horns are people of sea and rock, whenever a horn/generation goes, another replaces it. Alas, they are your associates to the end of time.”⁵⁰⁵

Another reference to the wars against Byzantium and the capture of Constantinople says that during the time of ‘Abd al-Malik, the Muslims will “meet in battle the army of the Byzantines sent against them, and they will kill them. Death will occur among the army ... of the Byzantines, and Ṣāliḥ will encamp with the *mawālī* in the land of Syria, and enter ‘Ammūrīya (Amorium) and encamp in Qumūlīya, and conquer Bīzanṭīya (Constantinople). The voices of his army in it will be openly [proclaiming] the

⁵⁰² Bashear, “Apocalyptic and Other Materials,” 180.

⁵⁰³ Bashear, “Apocalyptic and Other Materials,” 74.

⁵⁰⁴ Bashear, “Apocalyptic and Other Materials,” 181-182.

⁵⁰⁵ *fāris naṭḥa awnaṭḥatān thumma lā fāris ba’dahā abadan, wa-l-rūm al-qurūn aṣḥābbahr wa-ṣakhr, kullamā dhahaba qarn khalaḥanu qarn makānah, hayhāta ilā ākhir al-dahr hum aṣḥābukum...* Ibn Abī Shayba, 5/298, (Bashear’s trans.) in Bashear, “Apocalyptic and Other Materials,” 191. For an unknown reason Byzantines are presented as “the horned ones” *al-Rūm dhāt al-qurūn*, (cf. Qur’ān: *dhū l-qarnayn*, 18:83, 86, 94).

unity of God, and its wealth will be divided in containers.”⁵⁰⁶ When Mahdī appears before the end of the world and Jesus’ coming, he “will go out to the land of the Byzantines with about 100,000 [soldiers] and will arrive at Constantinople. He will invite the king of the Byzantines to accept Islam, but the latter will refuse and will fight him. The fight between them will last two months, then the king of the Byzantines will be defeated, and the Muslims will enter Constantinople.”⁵⁰⁷

The conquest of Constantinople appears as the final goal of Muslim eschatological expectations, which will subsequently lead to the fulfilment of God’s plan for salvation; its conquest seems imminent and certain. Of course, in these expectations both political and religious intentions were inextricably connected, and attempts to put these references into a historical frame were frequently pursued. One such example is the mention of three raids on Constantinople (in which, mosques would also be built), attributed to the Prophet himself.⁵⁰⁸ These references though, as Cook remarks, implied “the utter and complete confidence on the Muslim side that Constantinople will fall soon and the knowledge that by making such bold predictions they were placing themselves out on a limb. Anything less than the conquest of the city would be utter humiliation for the Muslims, something that many may have felt when this in fact did not happen.”⁵⁰⁹

Thus, Muslim apocalypticism, in juxtaposition to the Byzantine one, offers the comprehensible frame for understanding the on-going anxiety and the escalation of eschatological hopes both from the Byzantine and the Muslim side, at the beginning of the eighth century. Around that time then, both enemies were focusing on Constantinople, in anticipation of their expectations, although based upon entirely opposing interpretations of history, for the same end.

⁵⁰⁶ The reference comes from Artāt ibn al-Mundhir (trans. by Cook) in Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 349.

⁵⁰⁷ From Ibn ‘Abbās, Al-Sulamī, 260-261 (no. 303), Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 372.

⁵⁰⁸ Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 53.

⁵⁰⁹ Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 62.

Chapter 4

4. Constantinople's response to the Islamic challenge

4. 1. Introduction

Towards the end of 695, a coup in Constantinople deprived Justinian II of his throne and marked the start of an era of instability that would last until 717, with Leo III's ascent to the throne. Justinian II, amidst opposition from the West and the unpopularity of his harsh fiscal policies, was deposed and exiled to Cherson, after having his nose and tongue slit. Although Leontius, Justinian's successor, attempted to retake Carthage from the Arabs, the latter captured the city for a second time in 698, thus putting a final end to the Byzantine rule over Africa. During the reign of Tiberius Apsimar, the Arab invasions in Asia Minor continued, leading to further loss of frontier areas to the invading Muslims. Justinian's return (705), in an atmosphere of terror, brought revenge and cruel punishments to anyone the mutilated emperor considered as his enemy. During that period, no serious attention was given to the Arab threat, and most of Justinian's concerns were consumed by his efforts to avenge his violent dethronement.⁵¹⁰

The second reign of Justinian II came abruptly and violently to an end with an uprising (711), which led to the massacre both of the emperor and his son.⁵¹¹ Over the next six years, three emperors changed position on the throne of Constantinople, following the subsequent uprisings (Bardanes or Philippicus, Artemius or Anastasius, and Theodosius III).⁵¹² According to the deacon Agathon, the political instability, caused by the continuous riots against the rulers, led the Byzantine state to belittlement and great demise, and the imperial authority to utter contempt.⁵¹³ To make things worse, Philippicus

⁵¹⁰ See Ostrogorsky, *Geschichte*, Munich 1963, 127-130; Haldon, *Byzantium*, 74-82.

⁵¹¹ Theophanes says that the six-year old Tiberios was slaughtered like a sheep, 380.

⁵¹² Concerning the chronological problems of the reign of these three emperors, see Sumner, Graham V. "Philippicus, Anastasius II and Theodosius III," *GRBS* 17 (1976), 287-294.

⁵¹³ Mansi, 12.192A.

condemned the Sixth Ecumenical Council of 680, and issued an imperial decree reintroducing Monotheletism. His act, which was followed by the removal and destruction of an image of the Sixth Council in the palace, met the strong opposition of Rome.⁵¹⁴ In the meantime, the continuous Arab raids resulted in the depopulation of the frontiers and the seizure of several fortresses in Cilicia.⁵¹⁵ In the Balkans, the Bulgars under Khan Tervel, on the pretext of avenging the deposition of their ally Justinian, invaded Byzantine territory, ravaged Thrace and reached the walls of Constantinople itself. Anastasius restored orthodoxy and took immediate measures to strengthen the fortification and the defence of Constantinople, fearing an Arab attack. Whilst he was arranging a pre-emptive and surprise attack against the Arab fleet, the army (the Opsikion *thema*) mutinied once more and deposed him, putting on the throne —against his will— Theodosius. The dire condition of the Byzantine Empire was succinctly stated by Nikephoros: “On account of the frequent assumptions of imperial power and the prevalence of usurpation, the affairs of the empire and of the City were being neglected and declined; furthermore, education was being destroyed and military organization crumbled. As a result, the enemy were able to overrun the Roman state with impunity [and to cause] much slaughter, abduction, and the capture of cities”.⁵¹⁶

In this critical moment for the Byzantine Empire, Leo, a *strategos* of the Anatolikon *thema*, refused to serve Theodosius and challenged his imperial authority; and, supported by his troops, he was proclaimed emperor by the people. He entered Constantinople, and on 25 March 717, the day of the Annunciation, he was crowned emperor in Hagia Sophia by the patriarch Germanos.

Meanwhile, after the death of al-Walīd (715), his younger brother Sulaymān succeeded him. Only a few months after Leo’s coronation (in August 717) that the advancing Arab forces launched a long-awaited attack and laid siege to Constantinople, under the leadership of Sulaymān’s brother

⁵¹⁴ For the ‘pre-iconoclastic’ reactions between the emperor and the pope that followed Philippicus’ decision, see Ostrogorsky, *Geschichte*, 127-128; and Haldon, *Byzantium*, 79-80.

⁵¹⁵ See Lilie, Ralf-Johannes *Die byzantinische Reaktion auf die Ausbreitung der Araber: Studien zur Strukturwandlung des byzantinischen Staates im 7. Und 8. Jhd.*, Munich 1976, 116-121.

⁵¹⁶ Nikephoros, 121 (§ 52).

Maslama.⁵¹⁷ The assault against Constantinople was successfully repelled by the Byzantines, both on land and at sea, with the help of Bulgarian forces and the use of the “Greek-fire.”⁵¹⁸ In the course of the siege, Sulaymān died and was succeeded by ‘Umar II (717).⁵¹⁹ The ensuing harsh winter, hunger, and disease contributed to the deterioration of the Arabs’ position. Finally, the Arabs, following ‘Umar’s orders, decided to end the siege and withdrew on 15 August 718, the Dormition of Theotokos. Their departure was followed by a severe storm the hail from which sunk a great part of the Arab fleet in the Aegean Sea, on their way back to Syria.⁵²⁰ After this last Arab attempt to conquer Constantinople, the Arab strategy changed and become “oriented in the true sense, i.e. towards the East,” as Gibb suggested.⁵²¹

4. 2. Islamic challenge and Byzantine views

It seems that, in the aftermath of Constantinople’s siege, a new era begins for the relations between the two great enemies. Until then we do not have much evidence, from the imperial centre, about the Byzantines’ views of their enemies and their religious beliefs. It appears that the period after the siege of Constantinople necessitated an answer to this impending question. The events and politics of Leo III’s reign (717-741) corroborate this assumption and cannot be dismissed as mere coincidental facts. The aim of this chapter is to discuss certain events and texts of this period that reveal the formation of Byzantine views on Muslims and Islam, in close connection with the Islamic challenge imposed upon Byzantine thought and policies.

The reforms that took place under the Isaurian dynasty have been acknowledged and studied by Byzantinists. Their interest mostly turns around

⁵¹⁷ *Chron. 1234*, (300), in Hoyland, *Theophilus*, 210; Brooks, E. W. “The Campaign of 716-718, from Arabic Sources,” *JHS* 19 (1899), 21. On the siege, see also Canard, “Les expéditions des Arabes;” and Guillard, Rodolph “L’expédition de Maslama contre Constantinople (717-718),” *Études Byzantines*, Paris 1959, 109-133. For Maslama see Rotter’s art. in *EL*² and Gabrieli, Francesco “L’eroe omayyade Maslamah Ibn ‘Abd al-Malik” *Rendiconti Lincei* ser. 8, 5 (1950), 22-39.

⁵¹⁸ Theophanes, 397; Nikephoros, 123 (§ 54).

⁵¹⁹ Theophanes, 396; Tabari, *Tārīḥ* II:1337.

⁵²⁰ Nikephoros, 125-127 (§ 56).

⁵²¹ Gibb, A. R. Hamilton “Arab-Byzantine Relations under the Umayyad Caliphate,” *DOP* 12 (1958), 232. See also Haldon, *Byzantium*, 83.

the issue of Iconoclasm; and on the periphery of this issue, they discuss the role of the Islamic presence. Concerning this, the Byzantine, as well as the Arabic, sources sometimes directly connect Islamic policies with the emergence of Iconoclasm. For the majority of Byzantinists, the possible connection is “deemed unproven, unnecessary or even incredible.”⁵²² Apart from a handful of scholars who accept the role of emergent Islam in the introduction of Iconoclasm by Leo, the connection between the rise of Islam and Iconoclasm is met by scepticism, if not by total rejection.⁵²³ It is almost thirty-five years now, since the publication of Patricia Crone’s article, in which she argued the case for Islam being the catalyst for Byzantine Iconoclasm.⁵²⁴ Although, there has been an obvious change in modern scholarship concerning the closer attention and study of Islam’s rise and presence in connection with the Byzantine history,⁵²⁵ the attitudes towards the reasons for the introduction of Byzantine Iconoclasm do not seem to have considerably changed.

Following further research in the field and the new editions of several texts, the issue of the Islamic challenge arises anew. My intention is not to discuss Byzantine Iconoclasm but to broaden the perspective of the study of Islam as a crucial factor for Byzantine ideological change, including in the discussion a series of events and works during Leo’s reign (717-741). Furthermore, after the strong indications adduced by this study, I would like

⁵²² Crone, Patricia “Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm,” *JSAI* 2 (1980), 59. E.g., Lemerle denies any connection between Yazid’s edict and the Iconoclasm (Lemerle, Paul *Le premier humanisme byzantin*, Paris 1971, 32-33; Ahrweiler rules out any oriental influence in the rise of Iconoclasm, Ahrweiler, Hélène “The Geography of the Iconoclast World” in Bryer, Anthony & Herrin, Judith (eds) *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975*, Birmingham 1977, 21ff.

⁵²³ Those who accept a possible connection include Toynbee, Arnold J. *A Study of History: Abridgement of volumes VII-X*, Oxford 1957, 259; and Ostrogorsky, Georg *Geschichte des Byzantinischen Staates*, Munich 1963, 134: “it was the contact with the Arab world that caused the explosion of the simmering Iconoclasm.” Recently, a clear differentiation came from Judith Herrin: “From the analysis it is evident that Iconoclasm was born of the crisis generated by the Muslim advance, which set in process a complex reaction, both military and religious,” Herrin, *The Formation*, 343.

⁵²⁴ I have to admit —and acknowledge too— that the assumptions and suggestions of the first part of this article offered me the necessary impetus and inspiration for the following research; although I do not find convincing the arguments of the second part, concerning the provenance of Judeo-Christian groups, like Athinganoi (74-95).

⁵²⁵ E.g., as it is attested by the inter-disciplinary approaches in the series of workshops and books like *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, or the necessary presentation of Islam in most of the reference books, concerning Byzantium or the Late Antiquity.

to make the case for Leo's reshaping of Byzantine ideology as a voluntary and genuine response to the presence and the beliefs of Muslim Arabs.

Having said this, I do not wish to dismiss or underestimate that this response gradually emerged either through internal Byzantine —or for that matter Christian— concerns, aspects, queries and quests (as well as conflicts and debates). On the contrary, it was exactly these internal Byzantine concerns and beliefs that were on trial during this period of crisis and called for a re-examination of Christian principles and practices. Moreover, the articulation of the Byzantine response came by means of Christian inherited ideas, conceptions, and discussions about the meaning of monotheism, the place of the holy in Byzantine society,⁵²⁶ the position of the Christian Empire in God's plan for salvation, as well as the imperial ideology. The emphasis though should be put on the crucial question: who was responsible for the Byzantine crisis? Who, for almost a century now, had threatened even the mere existence of the Christian Empire? And consequently, since this enemy was claiming for themselves the monotheistic heritage, how should they be answered? However, it should always be remembered that, the answers proffered about the other's identity not only indicate the ways the transmitter considers the other, but quite significantly the ways they also understand and interpret themselves through the *speculum* of alterity.

4. 3. Apocalyptic expectations meet pragmatism

As discussed in the previous chapter, the rise of apocalypticism, from the late seventh century onwards, not only reveals the inherent tension within Islam and Christianity regarding the eschatological fulfilment of their religious expectations; it also reflects some other contemporary signs of that period. Furthermore, apocalypticism, in both Byzantine and Muslim territories, expressed in highly confrontational terms, reflects the contemporary state of war and the fears and expectations of victory or defeat and annihilation.

⁵²⁶ As aptly Brown defined Iconoclasm, see Brown, "A Dark-Age Crisis," 5; Cf. also, Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity," 64.

All this is articulated in religious terms and symbols. In this eschatological fight it is implied that there is no space for compromise: only one side will come out victorious and triumphant; and this attitude instigates the question of the validity of the faith. Apocalypticism is an attempt to understand and interpret contemporary events, by the use of religious ‘patterns,’ whose validity will be tested by their effectiveness.

This apocalyptic fervour culminates in an event of unsurpassed significance, the siege of Constantinople in 717-718. According to the apocalyptic texts, the siege of Constantinople is of paramount —both symbolic and pragmatic— importance for both the Byzantines and the Muslims. While for the former the siege of Constantinople (and the survival of their Christian Empire) seems a harsh trial of their belief, for the latter it is thought of as the ultimate prize and confirmation of their true faith and zeal.

As a consequence, the outcome of the siege could not have left things unchanged. It must have implied a series of certain thoughts and actions for both rivals. In a world where change is mostly considered as a deviation from the true path of religion (and usually condemned as an *innovation*), inevitably failure would have been presented as a reason for a return and compliance to the fundamentals of the faith, or rectification of wrong ideas and practices. Both medieval societies, Christianity and Islamdom,⁵²⁷ were oriented towards the fulfilment of the preordained —and foretold— end of history, which, though it follows a linear course, it does not encompass a conception of progress,⁵²⁸ but rather the idea of the fulfilment of the divine revelation sent to earth by the prophets and/or the Messiah.

It seems, as said before, that the *Visions of Daniel* are indicative of these fears and insecurities. Most interestingly, this text points to Constantinople as the field of the apocalyptic conflict, since the enemy now is *ante portas*. The successful deliverance from the enemy, no matter what relief it brought, apparently changed several things for the Byzantines — or at least their rulers. In the aftermath of the successful confrontation of the enemy, there was a call for examination of certain ideas and practices, upon which the empire has

⁵²⁷ As Marshall Hodgson would call it in his three-volume work *The Venture of Islam*, *passim*.

⁵²⁸ At least as this was conceived in the nineteenth century by the scientific and philosophical evolution.

based its life for the last centuries. And it actually did drastically reshape the character of the empire for the years to come.

The origin of Leo III was until recently a controversial issue. Theophanes and the eighth-century *Parastaseis* call him an Isaurian⁵²⁹ (although the former also calls him “the Syrian Leo”).⁵³⁰ Nikephoros refers to him simply as “Leon the patrician, *strategos* of the so-called Anatolic army,”⁵³¹ whereas the Eastern Christian sources claim that he was a Syrian.⁵³² His Syrian origin and his fluency in Arabic is also attested to by the Arabic sources, which convey that, when ‘Umar sent to Leo ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al- A‘lā and a “man from (tribe of) ‘Ans,” the latter stated the following about Leo: “When we came to him, we found ourselves before a man of Arabic speech and hailing from Mar‘ash.”⁵³³ The city of Mar‘ash is on the borders between the Muslim and the Roman domains (what for centuries would be called the *thughūr*).⁵³⁴ Nowadays, the majority of academic scholars accept that Leo grew up in this area, and so he may have been aware both of the Muslim presence, beliefs and practises as well as of the Roman weakness in the area.⁵³⁵ In addition to this, certain other characteristics, found in the populations living on the borders of two different ‘worlds,’ might be expected to be part of his growing up, such as the interactions between two different faiths, nations or cultures can bring to the fore. Although this biographical detail is of great importance for a better understanding of his concerns and attitudes, the extent to which he has been

⁵²⁹ Theophanes, 391; while Theophanes says that Leo’s origin was from Germanikeia, he adds “in reality Isauria;” see also *Parastaseis*, 58 (§ 1.2-3).

⁵³⁰ Theophanes, 412.

⁵³¹ Nikephoros, 121 (§ 52).

⁵³² Gero, Stephen *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 1-12.

⁵³³ Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, 1.295.

⁵³⁴ For the double function of the frontier as a limit and as a way of communicating with the opponent see Kaegi, Walter Emil Jr. “The Frontier: Barrier or Bridge?” in *The 17th International Byzantine Congress Major Papers*, Aristide Caratzas, New Rochelle N. Y. 1986, 279-303. The military importance as well as the social impact of the borders during the Abbasids is studied by Haldon, John & Kennedy, Hugh “The Arab-Byzantine frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Military Organisation and Society in the Borderlands,” *Zbornik Radova* 19 (1980), 79-116, now in Bonner, Michael (ed.) *Arab-Byzantine Relations in Early Islamic Times*, Aldershot 2004, 6. For the importance of the frontier in Byzantino-Arabic relations and the development of *jihād*, the work of Bonner is of particular interest: Bonner, Michael D. *The Emergence of the Thughūr: the Arab-Byzantine Frontier in the Early ‘Abbāsid Age*, PhD Thesis, Princeton University 1987; idem, “Some Observations Concerning the Early Development of Jihad on the Arab-Byzantine Frontier,” *Studia Islamica* 75 (1992), 5-31; and idem, *Jihad in Islamic History*, Princeton 2006, esp. 118-137 (until the Crusades).

⁵³⁵ E.g. Haldon, *Byzantium*, 87.

possibly influenced by Muslim, Jewish or Monophysite attitudes remains uncertain.⁵³⁶

Before discussing the aftermath of the siege of Constantinople and its possible repercussions for Byzantine thought and policies, something should be said concerning the available sources — both Byzantine and Arabic. The Arabic sources, according to Cheikh, although numerous “are late and contradictory, and the oldest accounts are already more legend than history.”⁵³⁷ The most complete of them, *Kitāb al-‘uyūn*, dates from the late fifth/eleventh century and it is heavily dependent upon eastern sources,⁵³⁸ whereas Tabari’s shorter account does not offer sufficient information, compared to the later Byzantine sources.⁵³⁹ When we turn to the Byzantine sources we have only the later works of Theophanes and Nikephoros, and a group of texts, which belong to the hagiographical genre. Furthermore, as Kazhdan has already remarked, “the Byzantine literature of this period essentially ignores the theme of the Arab war,” although “the Arab menace was a question of life and death for Byzantium.”⁵⁴⁰ However, due to the importance of the consequences of the siege of Constantinople, an attempt should be undertaken to discuss this issue.

With the centennial of the *hijra* approaching, the campaign for the conquest of Constantinople was definitely vested with apocalyptic expectations and messianic ideas connected to the person of the caliph himself.⁵⁴¹ Later Arabic sources, present the Prophet predicting that the capture of Constantinople would be carried out by someone bearing the name of a prophet. According to *Kitāb al-‘uyūn*: “when Sulaymān became caliph, he was informed by many learned men that the name of the caliph who should take Al-Kustantiniyya would be the name of a prophet; and there was no one among the Umayyad kings whose name was the name of a prophet except him.”⁵⁴² Nevertheless, after a year of siege, the Arabs had to withdraw; and

⁵³⁶ Cf. Haldon, *Ibid.*

⁵³⁷ El-Cheikh, Nadia-Maria *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs*, 63.

⁵³⁸ Cf. Brooks, “The Campaign,” 19.

⁵³⁹ Cf. Brooks, “The Campaign,” 20.

⁵⁴⁰ Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature*, 143-144.

⁵⁴¹ See Eisener’s art. “Sulaymān” in *EF*².

⁵⁴² *Kitāb al-‘uyūn*, 24: ‘inna Sulaymān lammā wallā khilāfa ḥadathahi jamā’a min ‘ulamā’ ‘in al-khalīfa alladhī yaftahu al-qusṭanṭīnya ismuhu ism nabiyy wa lam yakun fī mulūk banī ‘umayya man ismihu ism nabiyy ghaīrihi.

the Arab failure to conquer Constantinople was followed by an almost complete destruction of the fleet, as previously said. Curiously enough, both Arab and Byzantine historical sources do not mention a truce between the Byzantines and the Arabs.

Later Muslim traditions though, turn the defeat of the Umayyad power into a victory for Islam, by focusing on Maslama's triumphant entrance into Constantinople and the construction of a mosque in the very heart of the Christian capital. Furthermore, in an attempt to undermine the major defeat, they remain 'silent' about the destruction of the fleet and present the entrance of Maslama into Constantinople as a triumphant episode, which gave birth to mythologizing accounts later on.⁵⁴³ Ibn A'tham has Maslama saying to 'Abdallāh al-Baṭṭāl: "I enter this city knowing that it is the capital of Christianity and its glory; my only purpose in entering it is to uphold Islam and humiliate unbelief."⁵⁴⁴ Muqaddasi as well reports as follows: "And we should mention the things relative to Constantinople, because in it the Muslims have an abode (dār) in which they gather and show their faith ... Learn that, when Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik invaded the Byzantine Empire and entered into this city, he imposed as a term to the dog of the Romans the construction of a dār opposite his palace in the Hippodrome for the notable (Muslims) who were captured to reside in ... and the emperor responded positively to this demand and constructed Dār al-Balāt".⁵⁴⁵

In this attitude there is a discernible intention on the part of certain Muslim traditions to show that the Caliphate takes care of the religious needs of its subjects, even if they are imprisoned in a far away land. At the same time there is a claim to religious responsibility for its subjects all over the world, living either in dār al-Islām or in dār al-ḥarb. In other words, what started as a military expedition against a political enemy, at the end of the day, is presented mainly as an issue of faith, with universalistic claims.

Be that as it may, the available Arabic sources present the construction of an "abode (dār) in which" the Muslims "gather and show their faith" as the fulfilment of the demand imposed by Maslama (on Leo III), who according to

⁵⁴³ The Arabic epic of *Dhāt al-Himma* and the Turkish *Sidi Battal*.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibn A'tham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, 7:300-301.

⁵⁴⁵ Muqaddasi, *Ahsanal-Taḳāsim*, 147: "wa dār ulbalāṭ wadārulmalik alā ṣaff".

the same sources, entered Constantinople in a triumphant way, just after his failed siege of the city. Of course we cannot take these reports at face value; it seems that their main concern, in the aftermath of the failed siege, is to present the Arab forces as victorious —after such a humiliating defeat, and especially the destruction of the fleet— and thus to somehow mitigate the unsuccessful outcome of that enterprise.

On the other hand, the Byzantine historical tradition, following Theophanes, presents the events of 717/718 as a victory of the Virgin Mary. This is mainly due to the hostility that the Iconophiles had against Leo; not coincidentally, the erstwhile “pious” Leo of AM 6209,⁵⁴⁶ two years later is called “impious emperor.”⁵⁴⁷ Theophanes attributes the Byzantine victory to the intercession and help of the Virgin Mary, disregarding basic military facts.⁵⁴⁸ (It has to be noted here that Nikephoros in his *History* makes no mention of the intercession of the Virgin.) Again, it is evident (from the Byzantine point of view now) that the military success is presented as a triumph of the Orthodox faith. It is obvious that the confrontation is presented as being between two religions rather than two policies. Both the Byzantine Empire and the Caliphate are identified religiously.

However, there is another group of Byzantine texts commemorating a miracle worked by a Virgin’s icon during the siege of 717; these texts are found in several *Synaxaria* on 15th August. The first and longest one has been edited by Spyridon Lambros from a *Synaxarium* of the eleventh century, which can be found in the Imperial Library of Vienna.⁵⁴⁹ Another one is published by Delehay⁵⁵⁰ and the third one is a notice from the *Menologium*

⁵⁴⁶ Theophanes, 396.

⁵⁴⁷ Theophanes, 400.

⁵⁴⁸ E.g. the crucial role that the Bulgars played on the land expeditions against the Arabs. Not coincidentally the help of Theotokos is referred to four times in the events concerning the siege of Constantinople and the successive destruction of the Arab forces, whereas at the beginning —when Leo is still the “pious emperor”— only “divine help” is called for the emperor’s burning of the Arab ships.

⁵⁴⁹ Lambros, Spyridon “Ἡ ὑπὸ τῶν Ἀράβων Δευτέρα πολιορκία τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως καὶ Θεοδόσιος ὁ Γραμματικός,” *Ἱστορικὰ Μελετήματα*, Athens 1884, 129-144, where discussing the text of Theodosius Grammaticus on the siege of 717/718, he edits also the above-mentioned text, at the end of his article, 142-144. (Contrary to Lambros’ view, Olster argues that Theodosius’ text refers to the Arab siege of 674-678, in Olster, David “Theodosius Grammaticus and the Arab Siege of 674-78,” *BS* 56 (1995), 23-28).

⁵⁵⁰ *Synaxarium ecclesiae constantinopolitanae e codice Sirmondiano, opera et studio Hippolyti Delehay* in *Acta Sanctorum*, “Propylaeum Novembris,” Brussels 1902, col. 901-904.

Basilii.⁵⁵¹ In addition to these, there is also a historical preface in the Latin translation of the Akathistos hymn, which dates from before 802-806, mentioning the entrance of the Arab chief into the city.⁵⁵² Gero has dealt with these texts and the relevant problems they present.⁵⁵³ All of them mention the events, in a similar way to what we already know from Theophanes. However, they refer to an agreed permit of entrance of the leader of the Arab forces into the city, as a consequence of the concessions that took place to end the siege of Constantinople.

The text of Lambros goes as follows: “Suleiman their leader demanded to enter into the city in order to admire it; and when he was given the permit, he comes on a horse’s back to the Voosporin; while the others before him entered the door without harm, he could not enter because the horse stood upright on his feet. He looks upstairs and sees above the doorway a mosaic (icon) depicting the Holy Theotokos seated on a throne and holding in her arms our Lord Jesus Christ; realizing the blasphemy he committed, he dismounted the horse and walked on foot.”⁵⁵⁴

Apart from these references, I would like to draw attention to some other sources, that seem to have been neglected, regarding the discussion on the aftermath of the siege. The entrance to the city is also mentioned in the Syrian Zuqnin Chronicle (from AD 775): “Maslama asked Leo if he might enter the city to see it. He entered it with thirty cavalrymen, walked around for three days, and saw the imperial achievements. Dismissed, they came out of there, not having achieved anything.”⁵⁵⁵ Further evidence of the possible negotiations and the truce agreed between Leo and Maslama, is provided by the martyrological text of *The Sixty Pilgrims in Jerusalem* (dated to the mid-eighth century)⁵⁵⁶: “*the above mentioned messenger went to the God-loving and most pious king and, since he was a skilful and very wise ambassador, by many pleas he persuaded the genial and compassionate emperor to accept a*

⁵⁵¹ PG 117, 585D.

⁵⁵² Edited by M. Huglo, M. “L’ancienne version latine de l’hymne acathiste,” *Le Muséon* 64 (1951), 27-61; for the date, see 48-51.

⁵⁵³ Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 176-189.

⁵⁵⁴ Lambros, “H ὑπὸ τῶν Ἀράβων,” 143-144.

⁵⁵⁵ Harrak, Amir (trans.) *The Chronicle of Zuqnin: parts III and IV, AD 488-775*, Toronto 1999, 152.

⁵⁵⁶ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 362.

*seven year truce. As a result, the tyrant could return harmless and the merchants could freely and without any disturbance communicate between the dominion and the provinces of both [the Empire and the Caliphate]; and those who wanted to go on a pilgrim to the lands that Christ, our God, has trodden could do it without any trouble or harm. Then, they took oaths, guaranteed by common agreements, and they departed.”*⁵⁵⁷

All these references seem to agree that a truce was made between Leo and Maslama, and with all probability this happened inside Constantinople. Although truces between the Caliphate and the Byzantine Empire were quite common throughout the previous period, the entrance of a preeminent military Arab inside the city to sign a truce is unique. In addition to this, there is also a brief reference by Constantine VII, Porphyrogenitus (first half of the tenth century): “Maslamas, the grandchild of Mu‘āwiya, was the one who campaigned against Constantinople and who demanded the construction of the Saracens’ *masgidhion* (*masjid*) in the Imperial Praetorium.”⁵⁵⁸

The word *masgidhion* is encountered for the first time in Byzantine literature, and most likely —as its diminutive ending (*-idion*) indicates— it describes a small building. This seems to agree with Muqaddasī’s report, which implies that the *dār* was inside the building, where the notable prisoners of war were kept. It seems more likely that both sources refer to something similar to a prayer hall, inside the building, which was used as prison for notable Muslim prisoners of war; and was obviously intended to be used by the prisoners of war for their worship needs. Its location (close to the Royal Palace) sounds plausible, since the Arab prisoners were also kept there.⁵⁵⁹ In any case, the next reference to the existence or the function of this ‘mosque’ comes in the thirteenth century.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁷ *The Sixty Martyrs of Jerusalem*, Papadopoulos-Kerameus, A. (ed.) *Pravoslavnyi Palestinskij Sbornik* 12 (1892), 3, § 5. See the relevant discussion about this text in Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 176-181, and Huxley, George L. “The Sixty Martyrs of Jerusalem,” *GRBS* 18 (1977), 369-374; and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 360-363.

⁵⁵⁸ *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. G. Moravcsik, trans. R. J. H. Jenkins, Washington D.C. 1967, 21.111-114, 92.

⁵⁵⁹ “*kai desmioi apo tou praitoriou Tarsitai m’... apestalesan de kai tois en to praitorio enapomeinasin desmiois mil.*,” Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae*, 1, 592. 9, 12-13.

⁵⁶⁰ Now called *mitáton*, “*to ton ex Agar sunagogio... ho fesi Mitaton he dhmodhs dialektos*,” Nicetae Choniatae *Historia* I ed. Van Dieten, J. A. (CFHB 11), New York & Berlin 1975, 553.9. About the ‘mosque’, see Nomikos, Ch. A. “Τὸ πρῶτο τζαμί τῆς

The most likely reason for the emperor conceding to this action must have been from his part the realistic recognition of the power and the danger that the enemy still presented towards a weak Byzantine army, regardless of the successful repulsion of the Muslims from the walls of Constantinople. This situation is eloquently described in Syriac sources: “The Romans, too, though they considered the Arabs more imprisoned than themselves, were actually facing greater danger”.⁵⁶¹ Consequently, the concession for a place for Muslims to worship in should be considered as a diplomatic gesture/response of good will towards the already defeated enemy, who, nevertheless, remained strong and dangerous and still posed a great threat to the weak and vulnerable Byzantine State.

The sources from both sides try to make sense of the particular problems that each one was facing at that time. From the Arabic point of view it would have been humiliating, knowing the extent and the scale of the defeat, to acknowledge a defeat. Although the rather triumphant entry of Maslama into the capital seems quite improbable, Arabic sources, trying to reduce the effect of the defeat, produce an obviously mythologizing version of Maslama’s entrance into the city. Theophanes, on the other hand, very meticulously tries to present the Byzantine victory as obtained through the help and intercession of Theotokos,⁵⁶² and not by the skill and the abilities of the emperor. In the History of Nikephoros, although there is no hint of Leo’s abilities, there is no mention also of a divine (or Virgin’s) intervention in the destruction of the Arab fleet in the Aegean. Notwithstanding the unwillingness on the part of Arab sources to acclaim the victory to Leo and the Christian-Byzantine forces, it seems quite probable —from the limited sources available— that the siege was lifted as a result of negotiations.

What is significant though for our discussion is the fact that the Byzantines, and Leo, came face to face with the religious character of Islam. Islam from now on cannot be a remote and distant problem but resides inside the city. The Byzantines realized that they had to come to terms with the faith

Κωνσταντινουπόλεως,” *ΕΕΒΣ* 1 (1924), 199-209; Odetallah, Rashad Khouri “The Mosque of Constantinople: Myth and Reality,” *Ιστοριογεωγραφικά* 8 (2000), 257-264.

⁵⁶¹ Chron. 1234 and Michael the Syrian, in Hoyland, *Theophilus*, 213; see also Palmer, *The Seventh Century*, 213.

⁵⁶² See above, n. 481.

of Islam. Muslims, whatever they might have thought about their beliefs, had a distinctively different faith that had to be acknowledged. More importantly, it had to be acknowledged and accepted in the very heart of the Christian Empire, challenging —if not denying— emphatically the universal mission that the Christians had to spread Christianity at all over the world.

In the aftermath of the siege of Constantinople, it seems that apocalyptic fever did not preclude pragmatism. However, the annual Arab raids still continued unceasingly from the 720s to 741, reminding thus to the Byzantines that although the capture of Constantinople had been averted, the Islamic Caliphate still posed a great threat for the Christian Empire.

4. 4. Leo's Ecloga

“You also claimed that ‘Īsā has imposed upon you ordinances (*farā’id*) which he commanded and explained, but they [the Christians] did not observe them, and did not strive [to practice] apart from those of them which they found easy.”⁵⁶³

Leo and his son Constantine V issued the *Ecloga* (*Ekloge ton nomon*, “selection of the laws”),⁵⁶⁴ a law book, in all probability in March 741 rather than 726, as it had previously been thought.⁵⁶⁵ The main conception that the *Ecloga* introduces is the idea of *philanthropia* (love for humankind). First of all, as it has been noted, the *Ecloga* seems a rather unusual text,⁵⁶⁶ because it

⁵⁶³ *wa za’amtum ‘an ‘īsā faraḍa ‘alaykum farā’id ‘amarakum bihā wa baīanaha lakum falam tahffazūhā wa lam ta’ammalū ‘illā bimā khaffa ‘alaykum minhā*, Gaudel, Jean-Marie “The Correspondence between Leo and ‘Umar: ‘Umar’s Letter re-discovered?,” *Islamochristiana* 10 (1984), 150.

⁵⁶⁴ Although I have consulted Zepos edition, *Leges Imperatorum Isaurorum et Macedonum*, v, II, Athens 1931, I use the critical edition of Burgmann, Ludwig (ed.), *Ecloga*, Frankfurt am Main 1983 (English translation in Barker, Ernest *Social and Political Thought in Byzantium. From Justinian to the Last Palaeologus*, Oxford 1957, 84-85), in which he studies all the available codices and adds more material to the already known. See also *ODB*, “*Ecloga*.”

⁵⁶⁵ Burgmann, *Ecloga*, 12.

⁵⁶⁶ Crone, “Islam, Judeo-Christianity,” 71.

was mainly concerned with Christian law and not Roman law,⁵⁶⁷ as both Justinian's and Basil I's legal codes were. Besides this, it was not a usual and typical practice for the Byzantine emperors to promulgate new law books; actually, only the three above mentioned emperors did so. Moreover Basil, as explicitly stated in his *Epanogoge*, did it intentionally in order to replace the *Ecloga*, which altered or even negated to a certain extent the regulations of Justinian's *Corpus Juris Civilis*. Although the conception of philanthropy is the explicitly stated aim of the *Ecloga*, the literal application of the Mosaic law of retribution permeates the laws of the collection.⁵⁶⁸ Furthermore, while capital punishment and fines appear quite often in the Justinianic codes, in the *Ecloga* justice can be applied through a wide spectrum of punishments such as blinding, slitting of noses, chopping off of hands and tongue, or hanging and burning. Such corporal mutilations had been well known and established practices for a century in the Byzantine Empire;⁵⁶⁹ the great difference, however, is that now they are vested with the religious authority of Scriptural support, as it is proclaimed in the Preamble of the *Ecloga*. "The Ruler and Creator of every thing, our God, who made Man and honoured him with free will, gave him, as the Prophet says, the Law as a help to know what he should do and what he should not do: so as he can choose those things which will cause him the salvation, and repulse those which will cause him punishments ... For it is God who has proclaimed both, and the power of His words will ... as it is said in the Gospels, never pass away."⁵⁷⁰

This brings us to the most remarkable characteristic of the *Ecloga*, which is its Old Testament orientation. At the very beginning of the Preamble Isaiah's dictum is cited, which states that the law was given as a help to

⁵⁶⁷ Bury calls it "the first Christian law book," in Appendix 11 of his edition of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, Vol. 5, London 1898, 525; See also Gregory, T. E. "The *Ekloga* of Leo III and the Concept of Philanthropia," *Byzantina* 7 (1975), 269-270.

⁵⁶⁸ See Gregory, "The *Ekloga* of Leo III and the Concept of Philanthropia," 277: "another feature of the *Ecloga* is a tendency towards a *lex Talionis*. The concern for restitution and for punishments appropriate to the crime may be seen in this light;" and Brown, "A Dark-Age Crisis," 24: "an elaborate implementation of the law of Moses."

⁵⁶⁹ It is reported that precisely a century before, this eastern custom of mutilation was used during the deposition of Herakleios' wife Martina and his son Heraclonas in September 641; her tongue was cut off while his nose was slit (Theophanes, 341).

⁵⁷⁰ The initial phrase of the Preamble, see Burgmann, *Ecloga*, 160.

man.⁵⁷¹ Moreover, in the Preamble the citations of the Old Testament outnumber and overshadow the respective citations from the New Testament.⁵⁷²

The changes in law that the *Ecloga* brought “especially with regard to marriage and the power of the husband over the wife and children,”⁵⁷³ not only reflect the great influence of the canon law,⁵⁷⁴ but also attest to the subordination of the civil law to the canon law. It should be noted here that the Preamble starts with an invocation to the Holy Trinity, something unique in all Byzantine law books.

Two more innovative peculiarities that Leo introduced should be mentioned, as indicators of the possible impact of Islam upon Byzantine law: the unprecedented and unexpected reference, in a law book, to free will; and Leo’s declaration that the law book he promulgated (the *Ecloga*) is the instrument by which he will triumph over his enemies. It is telling of Leo’s intentions and attitudes that he repeats the latter three times in the Preamble: “through these weapons, by His [God’s] power, we want to powerfully confront the enemies.”⁵⁷⁵

The Muslims, like the Jews before them, quite often accused the Christians of lacking a divine law (although Jewish accusations were concerned about the non observance of the Mosaic law); this was a common theme in the Muslim-Christian polemic, especially in Iraq.⁵⁷⁶ In the earliest dialogue between the Jacobite patriarch John and an Arab emir, the latter says to John: “Show me that your laws are written in the Gospel and that you conduct yourselves by them, or submit to the law of the Muslims.”⁵⁷⁷ The above-mentioned phrase, allegedly penned by ‘Umar, implies that the Christians do not practise the laws given by Jesus in the Gospels. Christianity based upon the saving Grace of God and Paul’s antinomian theology left aside what was presented as the rigidity of the observance of the Mosaic law,

⁵⁷¹ *Nomon auto kata to profetikos eiremenon dedokos auto eis boetheian*, Burgmann, *Ecloga*, 160.

⁵⁷² Cf. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 56.

⁵⁷³ Haldon, *Byzantium*, 85.

⁵⁷⁴ See Haldon, *Byzantium*, 85.

⁵⁷⁵ See Burgmann, *Ecloga*, 162, l. 29-30, 36; and 166, l.90-92.

⁵⁷⁶ See Crone, “Islam, Judeo-Christianity,” 92.

⁵⁷⁷ Nau, François “Un colloque du patriarche Jean avec l’émir des Agaréens et faits divers des années 712 à 716,” *JA* ser. XI, 5 (1915), 261-262; see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 462.

considering salvation as a matter of faith and worship to God. On the other hand, having grown up in a Greco-Roman cultural environment, the laws Christians had to obey were products of social or imperial convention. Notwithstanding the fact that they had to live according to the Gospels' principles, the idea of a divinely ordained law that had to be followed in order to obtain salvation was not part of their theological perspective. As a result civil law (applied to the everyday life of citizens) was clearly distinguished from canon law (which dealt with moral conduct, aiming at their salvation). From the end of the seventh century though, a shift started to happen. It seems that the Quinisext Council succumbed to an interpretation of the canons in the spirit of the Mosaic law of the Old Testament, and not of the Christian grace of the New Testament. Its canons are suffused with Scriptural citations, whereas "previous canonical literature had made scarce direct use of Scripture."⁵⁷⁸ On the other hand, it has been noted that all the canons of the Quinisext are imbued with the theme of purity and purification.⁵⁷⁹ Even the very fact that it produced the double canons than all the previous Councils together shows its tendency to arrange Christian life according to a clearly expressed religious legislation. This tendency found application in canons relating to everyday life issues, expressing a severity and rigidity towards compliance with the religious law. This process, obviously rooted in Christian-Byzantine thought, was caused by internal Byzantine procedures and concerns but at the same time tried to respond to contemporary issues. Leo's *Ecloga* makes a decisive step in transferring the authority of the civil law under the auspices of the Christian religion and teachings; in other words, the law now is seen as given and ordained by God.

This attitude could not have been so successful if it had only been based upon Christian theological and Hellenistic thought. The Old Testament's influence was already profound, but to enforce its spirit and legislate in accordance with it, there was a need for a turn to its strict monotheistic message, which imposed also a divine law upon believers. Obviously, a return to Judaic practices was out of the question after the Christian revelation. The

⁵⁷⁸ Humphreys, M.T.G. *Law, Power and Imperial Ideology in the iconoclast Era: 680-850*, Oxford 2015, 52.

⁵⁷⁹ Humphreys, *Law, Power and Imperial Ideology in the iconoclast Era*, 67: "the recurring theme underlying all the canons is purity and purification."

Arab invasions though had seriously questioned their commitment to God's commands, as their expressed fears and concerns in the apocalyptic texts reveal. Following the Old Testament's 'pattern' then, they were likely to start 'Judaizing' as Crone wrote.⁵⁸⁰ Leo tried to bring the Christian faith and practice closer to its monotheistic source—from where all the subsequent versions of monotheistic creed emanated—so that nobody inside or, especially, outside the empire could doubt its absolute and unique monotheistic character. It should be underlined that the rise of Islam did not challenge the Byzantine Empire only militarily and politically, but religiously as well. The Muslim claim to Abrahamic legitimacy also implied the claim to the primordial Abrahamic monotheism, which was offered by no other than God.⁵⁸¹ The Byzantine Christians were definitely used to attacks on their monotheistic inheritance, particularly by the Jews, and their response was mainly based on the fact that Jews have been dispersed by God all over the earth and that their temple has lain burnt and ruined for six hundred years, as the anti-Judaic treatises manifest.⁵⁸² However, Judaism did not pose a political threat for the Byzantine power or Christian religion. On the contrary, the presence and persistence of the monotheistic Islam threatened the Christian Byzantium both religiously and politically. Apart from the military response then, a religious response should be proffered, based upon the common monotheistic tradition, the Abrahamic faith. Thus the Byzantine thought, and emperor Leo in particular I would argue, were challenged to articulate and conform to a, doubtless Christian, though more rigid and loyal to its Biblical roots, monotheism.

The Islamic challenge was the decisive factor that forced Leo and the Byzantines to turn to the Old Testament for Scriptural support of their monotheistic belief, in order to 'rectify' their wrong policy towards God's will and answer the monotheistic claims of the victorious Muslims. Due to this

⁵⁸⁰ Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity," 63.

⁵⁸¹ Cf. Magdalino, Paul & Nelson, Robert (eds) *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Symposia and Colloquia, Washington D.C. 2010, 5.

⁵⁸² See for example, *Les trophées de Damas: Controverse Judéo-Chrétienne du VII^e siècle*, ed. and transl. by Bardy Gustave in *Patrologia Orientalis*, XV(2), Paris 1920, 230; *Dialogo di Papisco e Filone giudei con un monaco*, testo, traduzione e commento Aulisa Immacolata e Schiano Claudio, Bari 2005, 198. (As Crone ironically noted, "Anti-Jewish writings are commonly dated by the number of years God has been angry with the Jews," Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity," 60).

effort, even the imperial ideology (as expressed in *Ecloga*) presented, for the first time, the Roman Empire exclusively in religious and not political terms, i.e. as Christian. Characteristically, in *Ecloga* the “word ‘Roman’ is completely absent. The only signifier is ‘Christian’... the ‘other’ is specifically external... implicitly above all the Islamic Caliphate.”⁵⁸³ Undoubtedly, the triple repetition of Leo’s intention to destroy his enemies through these laws does not leave any doubt about his motivation and inspiration for promulgating the *Ecloga*.

Leo might have seen himself as the expected apocalyptic king who would deliver his nation from the hands of God’s instrument of chastisement. His victories might have made him think, in these terms, about his mission and his duty towards God and his Chosen People. “The law of the *Ecloga* was subsumed within the dictates of heaven, and Leo was imagined as a second Moses.”⁵⁸⁴ In the eastern sources, as described by Gero, he is presented in a favourable light and with messianic overtones, as a saviour from the east to deliver Constantinople and its inhabitants. He is depicted as a Moses *redivivus* who sinks the Muslim fleet by touching the Bosphorus with a cross.⁵⁸⁵

A further affirmation on the ‘Mosaic’ character of the *Ecloga* is found in the so called *Nomos Mosaikos* (Mosaic Law); a collection of several Pentateuch excerpts, under the name of Selection (Eclogue) from God’s Law given to the Israelites through Moses. This Selection was transmitted along with the *Ecloga* in many manuscripts, and reflects the latter’s structure and name, and soon it was assumed that both collections were produced at the same time.⁵⁸⁶ “The *Nomos Mosaikos*, like the *Ecloga*, was made redundant by the revival of Roman law in the legislation of the Macedonian emperors after 867. Before that, however, we should not underestimate its impact on Byzantine legal culture of the eighth and ninth centuries.”⁵⁸⁷ As the numerous

⁵⁸³ Humphreys, *Law, Power and Imperial Ideology in the iconoclast Era*, 255.

⁵⁸⁴ Humphreys, *Law, Power and Imperial Ideology in the iconoclast Era*, 122.

⁵⁸⁵ Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 132-217, where there is a detailed study of these sources. Concerning Leo’s presentation of the Eastern Christian sources, Gero suggests that “such may have been the iconoclastic *hieros logos* which was replaced by the story of the icon and Sulaymān’s rearing horse,” *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 189.

⁵⁸⁶ Burgmann, L. & Troianos, S. (eds.) “*Nomos Mosaikos*,” *Fontes Minores* 3 (1979), 126-167.

⁵⁸⁷ Magdalino, Paul & Nelson, Robert (eds) *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, 20-21.

manuscripts reveal, there was a wide circulation of the *Ecloga* and diffusion in the West, the Slavic countries, as well as in Armenia and the Muslim East.⁵⁸⁸

Since Leo had recognized the worship of Islam inside the ‘Queen City,’ subsequently he would be the first to officially acknowledge the existence of the Islamic faith in an unconditional and clear way. This was evidently done in the *Ecloga*. The pinax “on those who converted (*magarisanton*)”⁵⁸⁹ refers to the article 17.6: “those who are taken prisoners by the enemy and abjured our supreme Christian faith should, if they return, be turned to the jurisdiction of the Church.”⁵⁹⁰ The verb *magarisai* seems still to be the legal and official name used to refer to conversion to Islam. The interference of the Church might suggest a ritual for conversion or, perhaps, religious cleansing in order for the converted ones to regain the identity of the Byzantine citizen. Additionally, it signifies both the acknowledgment of the Islamic faith—as alien and foreign to the Christian identity—as well as the transformation of the political identity of Byzantine citizenship to an overtly religious one.

In the penultimate paragraph of the *Ecloga*, Leo makes a statement that sounds at the very least strange and foreign for a Byzantine law handbook and for a Byzantine emperor: he says *ipsis verbis* that by these laws he offers worship to God, who has given him the sceptre of the kingship (*en toutois gar ton ta skepra tes basileias emin egheirisanta Theon therapevein spoudazomen*).⁵⁹¹ He openly declares the religious character of his legislation but furthermore, he makes clear that issuing the *Ecloga* is more than a religious duty; it is an act of worship to God. Beyond any doubt, Leo conceived the *Ecloga* as implementation of religious law. The empire should be governed by laws that obey God’s commandments, and their observance should be taken seriously, because by such legislation someone can be considered faithful and a member of the Christian Byzantine community. The main elements that constitute the religious character of Leo’s legislation (the Old Testament orientation and the influential power of the canon law), apart from being obvious, are easily understood and interpreted as the results of an internal evolution of Christian thought and its turn to Old Testament models,

⁵⁸⁸ See art. “*Ecloga*,” in *ODB*.

⁵⁸⁹ Burgmann, *Ecloga*, 158.

⁵⁹⁰ Burgmann, *Ecloga*, 228.

⁵⁹¹ Burgmann, *Ecloga*, 166, l. 89-90.

in search for comprehensive answers to the difficulties the Byzantines faced, i.e. the crisis caused by the Arabs. Nonetheless, the above-mentioned statement cannot really be explained or justified as a mere judaising attitude from —the Christian— Leo (the same one who forced the Jews to convert); even judaising for Leo had certain limitations, and these are the fundamentals of the Christian revelation. The religious context permitted him the interpretation of the empire using the Old Testament's typology, but there was a need for a stronger motivation than the problem of imperial authority, as claimed by certain scholars.⁵⁹² Then, the only plausible assumption left is to consider his attitude a genuine attempt to reply directly to Islam, by using its own conceptions, the sacredness of the law hereon. This conception, accompanied by his explicit and recurrent intention to be victorious over his enemies, by these laws, eloquently expresses his source of anxiety as well as the instigator of such acts.

4. 5. Leo and 'Umar's Correspondence

In 717, the year of the failed siege of Constantinople, Theophanes reports that “after a big earthquake had occurred in Syria, 'Umar banned the use of wine in cities and set about forcing the Christians to become converted (*magarisein*): those that converted (*magarisontas*) he exempted from tax, while those that refused to do so he killed and so produced many martyrs. He also decreed that a Christian's testimony against a Saracen should not be accepted. He composed a theological letter addressed to the emperor Leo in the belief that he would persuade him to convert (*magarisai*).”⁵⁹³

This report is also given by Agapius in a fuller form: “He ('Umar) wrote for Leo the king, a letter summoning him therein to Islam and, moreover, disputed with him about his religion. Leo made him a reply in which he tore apart his argument and made clear to him the unsoundness of his statement, and elucidated to him the light of Christianity by proofs from the revealed

⁵⁹² Haldon, *Byzantium, passim*.

⁵⁹³ Theophanes, 399.

Books and by comparisons from the insights and inclinations of the Qur'ān”⁵⁹⁴

Both ‘Umar and Leo were known for their religious reforms and zeal. Leo imposed the forced baptism of Jews and allegedly instigated Iconoclasm, whereas ‘Umar with his fiscal policies encouraged —if not urged— the conversion of Christians to Islam and enforced the application of Muslim law. ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-Aziz succeeded Sulaymān and promoted an Islamisation process in the Caliphate. His exalted piety and asceticism, against the worldly manners of the rest of the Umayyads, has something to do with contemporary Muslim concerns but it is also expressive of the attitudes of this caliph, who in addition was vested with messianic expectations.⁵⁹⁵ Although these similarities might be overemphasised, they cannot be dismissed and neglected, since there are several references from the eighth century that these two rulers were the first to conduct an official dialogue between Christianity and Islam.

The earliest account comes from Łewond,⁵⁹⁶ a late eighth-century Armenian chronicler who also provides us also with the text of the epistles, according to his claims. In addition to Łewond’s lengthy correspondence in Armenian, there is a shorter Latin version; though independent, both of them seem to be derived from the same Greek original. Gero has rejected the authenticity of this epistolary exchange, arguing that the whole narrative is taken from the tenth-century history of Thomas Artsruni and consequently has been reshaped by an eleventh or twelfth-century revision of Łewond’s work.⁵⁹⁷ Hoyland though, based on the studies of Sourdel⁵⁹⁸ and Gaudel (who ‘reconstructed’ the Arabic and the Aljamiado text of the alleged correspondence),⁵⁹⁹ resolved to a great extent the whole issue.⁶⁰⁰ He

⁵⁹⁴ Agapius 503. Neither Michael the Syrian nor the Chronicle of 1234 make any reference to ‘Umar’s letter, as also Hoyland noted; see Hoyland, Robert G. “The Correspondence of Leo III (717-41) and ‘Umar II (717-20),” *ARAM* 6 (1994), 166, n. 3.

⁵⁹⁵ Crone, Patricia & Hinds, Martin *God’s Caliph: Religious authority in the first centuries of Islam*, Cambridge 2003, 114.

⁵⁹⁶ See Jeffery, Arthur “Ghevond’s Text of the Correspondence between ‘Umar II and Leo III,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 37 (1944), 269-332.

⁵⁹⁷ Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 137ff.

⁵⁹⁸ Sourdel, Dominique “Un pamphlet musulman anonyme d’époque ‘abbāside contre les Chrétiens,” *Revue des études islamiques* 34 (1966), 1-33.

⁵⁹⁹ Gaudel, Jean-Marie “The Correspondence between Leo and ‘Umar: ‘Umar’s Letter re-discovered?,” *Islamochristiana* 10 (1984), 109-157.

persuasively refuted Gero's claims and, after scrutinizing the available texts and their exchange order,⁶⁰¹ argued that there was an exchange of letters between Christians and Muslims around the end of the eighth century. "Ostensibly ... the text of 'Umar's letter to Leo originates from the end of the eighth century."⁶⁰² This fits pretty well with Leo's reply (in Lewond's text) that "it is now 800 years since Jesus Christ appeared."⁶⁰³ Furthermore, Hoyland adduces that "at least some of the material in the [Lewond's] text as we have it is from the early eighth century."⁶⁰⁴ The lack of a specific interest in the issue of icons, allegedly corroborates that last remark, as Meyendorff has also argued: "the text clearly reflects a state of mind which was predominant at the court of Constantinople in the years which preceded the iconoclastic decree of 726 ... for neither the iconoclasts nor the orthodox were capable, at a later date, of adopting towards the images so detached an attitude."⁶⁰⁵ Although, Brubacker and Haldon's rejection of the existence of such a decree should be taken into consideration,⁶⁰⁶ regarding the above-mentioned views.

Thus, as recent research has shown, there was in circulation, at some time in the eighth century, a correspondence conducted under the names of these rulers.⁶⁰⁷ Needless to say, the texts, as we have them, have not been penned by Leo or 'Umar, but the contents fit in very well with the issues raised during that period and correspond to Christian and Muslim concerns, as we already know from the development of the Muslim-Christian polemic. The way this correspondence evolves makes it clear that Lewond's Leo is not trying a refutation of Islam in general, but that he gives certain answers to the specific issues raised by "a Muslim document under his eyes."⁶⁰⁸ Furthermore, the comparison of the texts shows that the dialogue's pattern always follows one direction: the Muslim writes first and the Christian answers the former's

⁶⁰⁰ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 490-501.

⁶⁰¹ I.e. Lewond's Armenian text, Sourdél's Arabic, Gaudel's Aljamiado as well as the Latin version of Leo's letter to 'Umar (published by Symphorianus Champerius in 1508).

⁶⁰² Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 494.

⁶⁰³ Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text," 282.

⁶⁰⁴ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 494.

⁶⁰⁵ Meyendorff, "Byzantine Views of Islam," 127.

⁶⁰⁶ See p. 173-174, below.

⁶⁰⁷ Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text," 269; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 494.

⁶⁰⁸ Gaudel, "The Correspondence," 116.

challenge.⁶⁰⁹ The caliph,⁶¹⁰ according to Lewond, initiated this debate asking several questions about the nature of the Christian faith: “There has often come over me a desire to know the teachings of your so imaginative religion, and to make a profound study of your beliefs ... So I pray you, tell me truly, why ... is it that you have not been willing to accept what Jesus Himself has said as to His person, but have preferred to make researches into the books of the Prophets and the Psalms, in order to find there testimonies to prove the incarnation of Jesus? This provides a reason for suspecting that you had doubts, and regarded as insufficient the testimony that Jesus bears to Himself.”⁶¹¹ However, we are informed by both sides (the Arabic text and Armenian text) that several letters have been previously exchanged between the two correspondents, either on religious or political and “mundane affairs.”⁶¹² And although, Lewond presents Leo’s reply to ‘Umar’s intriguing questions, the Arabic text has ‘Umar stating exactly the opposite.⁶¹³

Nevertheless, in both versions the caliph seems to be concerned with the following problems:

- The divinity of Christ.
- The falsification of the Scriptures by the Jews (*tahrīf*).
- Why Christians, although based in one Scripture, are divided into many sects.
- The reason that the Christians are looking for prophecies about Jesus in the Old Testament while at the same time they prefer to ignore the prophecies in the New Testament about Muḥammad.
- The rejection of certain Jewish practices, such as circumcision, sacrifice and the Sabbath.
- The veneration of the saints and their relics, the icons and the cross (“the instrument of torture”), and orientation during prayer.
- The lack of eschatology in the Bible, especially the Old Testament which hardly mentions Judgment, Heaven and Hell.

⁶⁰⁹ Cf. Gaudel, “The Correspondence,” 125-126.

⁶¹⁰ Whenever I refer to caliph or emperor, in this context, I mean the respective literature figures of the alleged correspondence, for the sake of discussion.

⁶¹¹ Jeffery, “Ghevond’s Text,” 277.

⁶¹² Jeffery, “Ghevond’s Text,” 282.

⁶¹³ Gaudel, “The Correspondence,” 133.

Leo accordingly responds to these questions, referring to the Bible for attestation of the Christian truth. He claims that he already has complete knowledge of Islam, due to the possession of “historical documents by our blessed prelates who were living at the same epoch as your legislator Muḥammad” and his awareness (?) of the Muslim revelation, which he names *Furqān*.⁶¹⁴ On the caliph’s accusations against falsification of the Scriptures by the Jews, he presents several arguments from the Bible but he also counterattacks by referring to al-Ḥajjaj’s falsification of the Muslim Scriptures.⁶¹⁵ He goes on defending the divinity of Christ and his dual nature, and supports Jesus’ coming to the world as foretold by the prophesies of the Old Testament. On the other hand, he dismisses the interpretation of ‘Paraclete’ as a foretelling of Muḥammad’s mission, by explaining that the name ‘Muḥammad’ means “to give thanks or to render grace” whereas “Paraclete signifies consoler”.⁶¹⁶ Furthermore, he supports the veneration of saints, icons and the cross and attacks the Arabs as idol-worshippers due to their veneration of both the Ka’ba and the Black Stone. As for the divisions and schisms between the Christians, he considers them “divergences” due to the “differences of language” into which the Gospel has been already spread: “I have said divergence, because there has never been among us that bitter

⁶¹⁴ Jeffery, “Ghevond’s Text,” 292. Apart from the Aramaic/Syriac origin of this word, which may signify redemption, salvation, or separation (and for which see Paret’s art. in *EF*²; Jeffery, Arthur *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’ān*, Baroda 1938, 225-229; and Donner, Fred M. “QuranicFurqān,” *JSS* 52 (2007), 279-300, see also the interesting art. Rubin, Uri “On the Arabian Origins of the Qur’ān: The Case of *al-Furqān*,” *JSS* 54 (2009), 421-433, where Rubin, in addition to the already well-known origins, argues also for an Arabic origin, with the meaning of ‘dawn light,’ which consequently led to its quranic significance as ‘guiding light’ (of revelation).

⁶¹⁵ Jeffery, “Ghevond’s Text,” 298.

⁶¹⁶ Jeffery, “Ghevond’s Text,” 293. According to Griffith’s research (Griffith, Sidney “The Gospel in Arabic: An Inquiry into its Appearance in the First Abbasid Century” in *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine*, Variorum, Ashgate1992, II, 137-138), it has to be mentioned here that the earliest known quotation from the Gospel in an Islamic Arabic text is the reference to Paraclete from *John* 15: 23-16: 1, and it is found in Ibn Ishāq’s biography of the prophet (by Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat an-nabī*; see trans. by Guillaume, A. *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishāq’s Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, Oxford 1955, 149-150). In this quotation also, the word *Father* is replaced by the word *Lord* or *God*, precisely as ‘Umar is doing on his letter to Leo, according to latter’s accusation, when he discusses quotations from *John* (Jeffery, 312). The text of *Sīrat* renders *John*’s quotation as follows: “Had *al-Munahhemana*, whom God will send, come to you from the Lord, and the spirit of truth, he who comes from God, he would have been a witness for me and you also, since you have been with me from the beginning. I have said this to you that you should not have any doubt;” and it continues: “*Al-Munahhemana* in Syriac is Muḥammad and in Greek (Roman) he is *al-baraqḥitis*” (150).

hostility such as one sees deeply rooted among you”.⁶¹⁷ He then turns to criticism of Muslim practices and habits, and especially the licentious Muslim way of life as well as their carnal lusts with many women.

He leaves for the end of his letter the answer to the caliph’s statement about the successful spread of the Arabs, due to their reliance upon God, and the subsequent implicit conviction of God’s favour towards Muslims. ‘Umar writes: “We marched against the nations of the Persians and the Romans, small in number and weak. And God helped us against them and so we settled in their countries, and we took possession of their land, their houses and their wealth; having no other power or might than the (religion of) truth, thanks to God’s power and his mercy and help. Indeed his mercy and blessing never ceased; they encouraged us instead every day and night until we reached this state of ours”.⁶¹⁸ The emperor’s answer is as follows: “For the sake of our unshakable and imperishable faith we have endured at your hands, and will still endure, much suffering. We are even prepared to die, if only to bring to ourselves the name of ‘saint’... Because such is our hope you continually menace us, you strike us with death, but we respond not to your blows with anything other than patience, for we count on neither our arm nor our sword to save us, but on the right arm of the Lord, and on the light of His face. Should He will it we are prepared to suffer still more in this world, so as to be recompensed in the world to come. Yea, let Him fix the hour and the mode of the torture, we are ready prepared. As for you, persisting in your tyranny and your usurpations, you attribute to your religion the success with which heaven favours you. You forget that the Persians also prolonged their tyranny for 400 years. What was the reason for so long a reign? God alone knows; but surely it was not because of the purity of their religion. As for us, we accept with eagerness all the sufferings and all the tortures which can happen to us for the glorious name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, so that we may arrive at

⁶¹⁷ Jeffery, “Ghevond’s Text,” 296.

⁶¹⁸ *wa ‘aqharihi lil- ‘umum fāris wa ar-rūm fasaranā ‘ilīhim bial- ‘adad al-qalīl wa al-qūūa al-ḍa’īfa fanaṣaranā Allah ‘alīhum wa makkanna fī bilādhim wa ‘anzalanā ‘ardīhum wa dyārhum wa ‘amāluhum min ghaīr ḥaūl minnā wa lā qūa ‘illā bial-ḥaqq biḥaūl Allah wa raḥmatuhu wa naṣruhu thumma lam īazal biraḥmatīhi ‘īānā wa na‘matīhi ‘alīnā īazīduna fī kull īaūm wa laīla ḥattā balaghna mā ‘aṣbahna fīhi*, Sourdél, “Un pamphlet musulman anonyme,” 33.

the happiness of the future world with all those who have loved to see the coming of the great day of Judgment of God”.⁶¹⁹

Overall the tone seems to be honest and not polemic. Leo does not make any effort to convert the caliph to Christianity. Mostly he refers to Muslims’ “legislator,” the *Furqān*, and to their practices as barbarian fancies and habits. He emphasizes the misreading of the Scriptures and the Christian doctrine by the caliph but he never makes any direct attack on the faith of Muslims.⁶²⁰ Although he claims that “Holy Writ bids us reply to those who question us” and “God Himself ... commands us to instruct our adversaries with kindness ... our ordinary laws by no means impose on us the duty of smiting with hard words, as with stones, those who manifest a desire to learn the marvellous mystery of the truth.” He also reminds the caliph that “our Lord ... has bidden us from exposing our unique and divine doctrine before heretics.”⁶²¹ As a result, he refrains from expressing either an overtly polemic attitude or a zeal for conversion.

The themes discussed are quite familiar from the polemic debates between Muslims and Christians in the eighth century; actually they are *loci communes* of this well-attested controversy, with the notable exception of two topics introduced by the caliph. The reference to an alleged phrase of Jesus “Naked you came, and naked you will go”,⁶²² and the presentation of Satan as God’s treasurer⁶²³ are quite distinct topics, and they are found in both texts (Arabic/Aljamiado and Armenian). Due to the lack of a precise date for the available texts, further scrutiny and detailed commentary seem unnecessary here. However, for the purpose of this study, the following important points can be deduced from the above-mentioned correspondence.

Regardless of the exact date, this alleged dialogue shows that the imperial centre and the Byzantine court, at some point around the eighth century, had to come to terms with the reality of the Islamic presence ideologically and intellectually. One way or another, they had to recognize the existence and

⁶¹⁹ Jeffery, “Ghevond’s Text,” 329-330.

⁶²⁰ Cf. also Heino, Olof *Seeing Eye to Eye: Islamic Universalism in the Roman and Byzantine Worlds, 7th to 10th Centuries*, PhD Thesis, University of Vienna, Vienna 2010, 104.

⁶²¹ Jeffery, “Ghevond’s Text,” 282.

⁶²² Gaudel, “The Correspondence,” 133; Jeffery, “Ghevond’s Text,” 277.

⁶²³ Jeffery, “Ghevond’s Text,” 326; Gaudel, “The Correspondence,” 148; Sourdel, “Un pamphlet musulman anonyme,” 28.

permanence of Arabs and Islam not only on the battlefields but in everyday life as well. They had to give a 'name' and substance to their persistent enemy, and by doing so they defined themselves towards the Islamic Caliphate. The Byzantines appear to have certain and solid knowledge of some Islamic beliefs and practices and they could articulate their arguments against them, having already absorbed and integrated the previous Christian-Muslim debates, as it is obvious from the available Christian anti-Muslim polemic of the first half of the eighth century. Most of the themes and answers given in the correspondence are in accordance with the themes explored by Melkite and/or Syrian Christians in the Middle East (to be discussed in the next chapter). They follow the ideas and conceptions that have been already discussed and shaped by the Christians living inside the Caliphate.

The apocalyptic fervour that emerged in the previous decades had already caused anxiety on both sides, although for completely different reasons. Eschatological expectations and military aspirations, stirred up by certain *ḥadīths* and popular feeling, led the Arabs in front of the Byzantine capital just to see their hopes and certainties being crushed in front of the walls of Constantinople. On the other hand, the redeeming outcome of the siege should have offered the Byzantines a welcome respite from their survival anxieties. But what was at stake for both sides was the validity of each one's faith. Both the Arabs and the Byzantines, through the apocalyptic scenarios that appeared from the end of the seventh century, were searching for an answer to this agonizing question. In the religio-cultural frame of life and thought they were living, the knowledge that God is by their side offered them the necessary mental and social impetus. The failed siege of Constantinople, apart from disheartening the Arabs, should have definitely put into question the credibility and validity of their faith. Besides this disenchantment, the Arabs, throughout the eighth century, faced several military setbacks; during the campaigns in 726 and 739, of Ḥisham b. 'Abd al-Malik, the Arab forces were decisively defeated, particularly at Akroinon in 740.⁶²⁴

'Umar concludes his letter by referring to God's support to the Arabs during their victorious conquests over the stronger and mightier empires of

⁶²⁴ Wellhausen, *Das Arabischereich*, 340.

the Persians and the Byzantines. Leo on the other hand, being the first Byzantine emperor to successfully oppose the Arab threat, makes clear that military success does not mean God's approval; something that was evident in the case of the Persians, who after dominating the world for four centuries, were destroyed by the Arabs. "God alone knows" why some nations ascend to power, but surely this has nothing to do with religion. His mention of the Persian Empire's fate might also be heard as a warning for the Caliphate's impending future. Yet a certain sense of pragmatism does not allow him to underestimate the Arab power and he recognizes the fact that the Christians still have to continue to suffer under the Arabs. His decisive response to this menace derives from the Christian tradition: he chooses (for the Byzantines) the way of martyrdom "for the glorious name of Jesus Christ" and the happiness during the Last Judgment. A centennial of military and political confrontation led to a religious response; and this religious response points to the transformation of both the Byzantine Empire and the Caliphate in the years to come.

The previously mentioned Muslim eschatological expectations could also partially explain 'Umar's interest in and reference to the lack of eschatology in the Bible. Leo turns to the Old Testament for a reply and he also stresses his belief in the Last Judgment, at the end of his letter. One aspect of this dialogue is the extended use of citations of and references to the Old Testament that Leo makes. The Old Testament was an indispensable part of Byzantine culture and it was used extensively in liturgical life, literature, and even as a source of inspiration for imperial models. Its ideology has imbued the Quinisext Council (692 A.D.), in which the history of Israel was 'read' and understood in the context of the contemporary, threatened and besieged Byzantium.⁶²⁵ "The Old Testament in Byzantium was ... more than a repository of devotional and doctrinal texts,"⁶²⁶ while its reading, because of its Jewish provenance, always implied the question for its possible addressees. Furthermore, the history of the Jews in the Old Testament was read and understood by the Byzantines "as a repertoire of roles and situations, and as

⁶²⁵ For the influence of the Old Testament upon Byzantine ideology and life, see Magdalino, Paul & Nelson, Robert (eds.) *The Old Testament in Byzantium*; see also the relevant discussion in Dagron, Gilbert *Emperor and Priest*, Cambridge 2007, 48-50.

⁶²⁶ See Magdalino's Introduction on the above-mentioned work, 7.

the only typology, which made it possible to judge the present and the future.”⁶²⁷

Nevertheless, Leo’s extensive use and frequent recourse to it was unprecedented. Leaving aside his numerous mentions of names and events from the Old Testament, in his epistle, the quotations from the Septuagint count more than double those of the New Testament, and they are found scattered all over his text, whereas the New Testament quotations are mostly gathered together. He defends the Old Testament’s divine origin and authority, upon which the Christian faith is solidly based, while, explaining its formation and significance. He says that the first five books (under the Hebrew and Greek name *Torah* and *Nomos* respectively) “contain teaching about the knowledge of God, an account of the creation of the world by Him, the prohibition of the worship of pagan divinities, the covenant concluded with Abraham, the goal of which was Christ, and the laws concerning civil procedure and sacrifice, laws which put them [the Jews] far from the customs of that paganism for which they showed so much attachment.”⁶²⁸

Leo deals with the Old Testament at such length not only due to the exigencies of this letter but also as he clearly thinks of it as the basic and primordial text of God-given monotheistic belief. He seems to be fully aware of the Muslims’ claim to be the sole heirs of Abrahamic monotheism and their acceptance of the *Pentateuch*, the *Psalms*⁶²⁹ and the Gospels.⁶³⁰ By insisting then on his Christian interpretation and defence of the Old Testament, he attempts to uphold the Christian faith as the unique and legitimate heir of Abrahamic monotheism. He even talks about the enmity between the Christians and the Jews based upon the formers’ belief in the divinity of Christ,⁶³¹ thus somehow connecting the Muslim faith with the Jews. In fact, he devotes the greatest part of his answer to providing ‘proofs,’ adduced from the Prophets and the Gospels, about the divinity of Christ.

Beyond the issues of authenticity of this correspondence, though closely connected to what is said above, mention should be made here to the forced

⁶²⁷ Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 165-166.

⁶²⁸ Jeffery, “Ghevond’s Text,” 287.

⁶²⁹ The greatest part of the quotations are from the Book of Psalms.

⁶³⁰ Although ‘Umar’s letter makes disproportionately more references to the Gospels than the Old Testament. See the relevant index in Gaudel, “The Correspondence,” 156-157.

⁶³¹ Jeffery, “Ghevond’s Text,” 288.

baptism of the Jews, decreed by Leo III. Both Theophanes and the eastern sources report that in 720 the emperor ordered the forced baptism of Jews (and Montanists).⁶³² Michael the Syrian adds that the Jews after their baptism “were called neapolitans, that is new citizens.”⁶³³ This points to the conception of the Byzantines as the “verus” and “new” Israel,⁶³⁴ and marks the efforts of the emperor to mould his subjects into one Christian nation, absorbing into this new identity all the religious dissidents, and especially the Jews, who might always pose a claim to the inheritance of God’s covenant.⁶³⁵ This transition is well attested to from the late seventh century, through the references to the Byzantines as the *Chosen People*, either in a religious or political context. The Quinisext Council is full of references to the *Chosen people*,⁶³⁶ while Justinian II called the army he raised against the Arabs (and this is really telling) the Chosen People.⁶³⁷ Furthermore, I think that his action to ordain a forced conversion upon the dissidents of the empire is a clear manifestation of his belief that only Byzantine Christians are the authentic and unique heirs of monotheistic Abrahamic belief; and this view definitely excluded and denied the Muslims’ claims to the same monotheistic heritage.

Leo, by contrasting the diffusion of Christianity to all the populations of the *oikoumene* (through all the known languages) with the Muslim faith, which is “professed by a single nation ... speaking a single language,”⁶³⁸ clearly underlines the universalistic Byzantine ideals and goals. Furthermore, he also presents the Byzantine Empire as the defender of the Christian faith all

⁶³² Theophanes, 401; Agapius, 504; MSyr 11.XIX, 457/489-90; *Chron* 1234, 308. Now in Hoyland, *Theophilos*, 221.

⁶³³ MSyr 11.XIX, 457/489-90; in Hoyland, *Theophilos*, 221.

⁶³⁴ A process that started from the 7th century. See e.g., George of Pisidia, *Inrestitutionem S. Crucis*, line 25, in Pertusi, Agostino (ed.) *Giorgio di Pisidia, Poemi. I. Panegericiei*, *Studia Patristica et Byzantina* 7, Ettal 1960, 125, where the Byzantines are presented as the ‘true Israel’. Cf. Brown, “A Dark-Age Crisis,” 24.

⁶³⁵ It should be noted that the emperors that enforced the Old Testament’s ideology (Herakleios, Leo III and Basil I) were the ones that imposed forced conversion to the Jews.

⁶³⁶ See Ralles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων*, Athens 1852, 2:295–554; also edited and translated in *The Council in Trullo Revisited*, ed. G. Nedungatt and M. Featherstone, Rome 1995, 45–185.

⁶³⁷ Theophanes, 366; Nicephorus, 95 (§ 38). On the use of the phrase *Chosen people*, by Justinian II, see Anagnostakis, Ilias “Περὶ οὐσίος λαός” in *Οἱ σκοτεινοὶ αἰῶνες τοῦ Βυζαντίου* (7^{ος}-9^{ος} αἰ.), Athens 2001, 325-346.

⁶³⁸ He remarkably mentions it twice: Jeffery, “Ghevond’s Text,” 296 & 298.

over the world, even inside the conquered territories of the Caliphate (“those who have fallen under your tyranny, yet they are none the less Christians”).⁶³⁹

The whole correspondence between these two political rulers is concerned with religious issues. The answers to the political or military issues, raised there are of a religious nature too. Instead of two (political or military) enemies, from now on we have two confronting faiths. Notwithstanding its literary character, the epistolary exchange eloquently represents the transformation of the Byzantine Empire. The transformation, which started in the seventh century with Herakleios, now draws to a close: the previous concept of an imperial Christianity is (re)shaped into a Christian Empire. The striking feature of this correspondence, for this study, is that the Byzantines, after a century of ‘silence’, express their views on their enemy. For a century they have suffered the loss of the greatest part of their territories and they have also been the victims of continuous attacks. During this period, they reverted to the well-known and embedded Biblical scheme of sin, punishment and repentance —through apocalyptic scenarios— in order to provide themselves with some effective answers to their questions upon the validity of their faith. Now things change. For the first time they are victorious against the Arab menace; and for the first time we hear their voice aloud. Their response comes as a result of the pressing challenge that Islam posed upon the empire. The Byzantines decide to name the Muslim enemy that threatened their existence for so long and imposed upon them agonising questions; and by doing this, they acquire a different understanding of their own selves, their role and mission in history. It is not a mere coincidence that this answer is put in the mouth of Leo, the victorious emperor against the advancing Arabs (although not authentically).

There is one last point that shows that there might be more in the picture than meets the eye. The Latin version of the alleged correspondence concludes with Leo’s mention of free will. This issue, totally absent from the imaginary dialogue of the other texts, quite surprisingly —and

⁶³⁹ Jeffery, “Ghevond’s Text,” 297.

unexpectedly— appears formally and authentically in Leo’s Preamble of the Ecloga.⁶⁴⁰

4. 6. Byzantine Iconoclasm, Islamic Iconophobia, and the Melkite Christians

I left the examination of Leo’s iconoclastic policy for the end of this chapter not because of its chronological sequence, but in an attempt to elucidate its instigation as part and parcel of Leo’s growing awareness of the Islamic challenge, while at the same time answering internal theological and political problems. It should be said in advance that, although I follow the conventional use of the term Iconoclasm, the Byzantines used the more appropriate word *Iconomachy* (the struggle against icons), which explains more accurately what was precisely happening during those controversies.⁶⁴¹

Because of its importance in the transformation of the Byzantine Empire, the more than one hundred years of Iconoclastic controversy have not ceased to stimulate academic interest. Moreover, it has been the subject of the most intense debates in Byzantine studies;⁶⁴² until today, several approaches and suggestions have been explored and proffered by numerous scholars. Even though the studies and the bibliography on Iconoclasm are already huge, they are still expanding.⁶⁴³ Relevant to the abundance of studies and suggestions on this topic is the often-quoted phrase of Peter Brown stating that, “the Iconoclast controversy is in the grip of a crisis of over-explanation.”⁶⁴⁴ The purpose of this study is not to discuss Byzantine Iconoclasm in itself, not even to suggest a new ‘explanation,’ but rather to re-examine the oldest proposal,

⁶⁴⁰ Although I am fully aware that this might be interpreted by several ways (one of which could be an —alleged and surely ambiguous— knowledge of the Ecloga, by the author of the Latin version), my point is that the texts during that period might be more telling in what they conceal than in what they transmit.

⁶⁴¹ Cf. Brubaker, Leslie & Haldon, John *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, C. 680-850: A History*, Cambridge 2011, ix.

⁶⁴² Cormack, Robin “Art and Iconoclasm” in Jeffreys, Elizabeth, Haldon, J. & Cormack, R. *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, Oxford 2008, 751.

⁶⁴³ A valuable book of reference, into which the available sources (both material and written) on Iconoclasm can be found, is Brubaker, Leslie & Haldon, John (eds) *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca 680- 850): the Sources, an Annotated Survey* (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs, v. 7), Aldershot 2001, which is also ‘accompanied’ by Brubaker, Leslie & Haldon, John *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, C. 680-850: A History*, Cambridge 2011.

⁶⁴⁴ See Brown, “A Dark-Age Crisis,” 3.

which connects Iconoclasm's instigation with the Islamic factor, against the background of Leo's policies and attitudes, while drawing attention to the contemporary evolution of Iconoclastic and Iconophobic attitudes of the Muslims and the Melkite Christian community of the Middle East. Having said this, it should be made clear that, in any case, the relationship between Byzantine Iconoclasm and Islam is not regarded as a cause-and-effect relationship but rather as an interaction between monotheistic cultures, based upon similar sets of questions and answers. There is no underestimation of the contribution of several other parameters of that period, as well as Leo's genuine response to his contemporary disputes and challenges; on the contrary, I consider the Islamic challenge as the necessary catalyst in that historical circumstance, when several and diverse factors have accumulated, which enabled the introduction of Iconoclasm.

The fruitful results of the "over-explanation" can be shortly summarised as follows:⁶⁴⁵ while Byzantine sources refer to the influence of caliph Yazid's edict upon Leo's decision, some scholars have seen in Iconoclasm the revival of older polemics against religious art, which carried traces of paganism.⁶⁴⁶ Others suggested that Leo was trying to purify Christian doctrine because of God's punishments of the Byzantine population by the Arab attacks and natural disasters, such as the volcanic eruption that occurred on the islands of Thera and Therasia in 726.⁶⁴⁷ Economic motives, involving the confiscation of Church and monastic property, have also been offered as possible reasons for the Iconoclastic controversy, while recently the role of imperial power has been strongly emphasised. Iconoclasm is regarded as the apex of Caesaropapism, or as an effort to re-establish the traditional imperial cult, or the imperial attempt to establish its authority, by also expanding it over ecclesiastical matters, in an era of internal as well as external crisis.⁶⁴⁸ Furthermore, Brown explained Iconoclasm against the backdrop of the Byzantine cities, as a crisis concerning the position of the holy: the bishops' effort to gain central ecclesiastical and civic authority over the issue of the

⁶⁴⁵ For which, see art. Iconoclasm in *ODB*.

⁶⁴⁶ Alexander, P. J. *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople*, Oxford 1958, 6-22; Martin, E. J. *A history of the Iconoclastic Controversy*, London 1930.

⁶⁴⁷ Mango, Cyril "Historical Introduction" in Bryer, Anthony & Herrin, Judith (eds) *Iconoclasm*, Birmingham 1977, 2ff.

⁶⁴⁸ For a more recent approach see Haldon, *Byzantium*; and Brubaker & Haldon, *A History*.

cult of saints, due to the latter's localised and uncontrollable nature, which focused on the relics, icons, monasteries and holy men, dispersed all over the Byzantine territory.⁶⁴⁹

The debates on the nature and role of images in the life of the Church were definitely older than the eighth century; and opposition to the cult of icons starts from the fourth century.⁶⁵⁰ Towards the end of the seventh century it seems that the representation of Christ received imperial as well as ecclesiastical approval. As it has been said earlier, Justinian II during his first reign (685-695) introduced a change in Byzantine coinage. For the first time, the representation of the emperor was replaced by the bust of Christ on the obverse of the golden coin, while the emperor's figure was displayed on the reverse. This manifestation of the belief on Christ's Incarnation, and the salvation wrought by God in His human form, seems also to be "a firm statement of Christ's role as intercessor between the world below and heaven above."⁶⁵¹ The 82nd Canon of the Quinisext Council (692) promoted the doctrinal status of images, (as well as the first canonical regulations concerning art, as Brubaker noted),⁶⁵² by ordering the representation of Christ in human form, and forbidding his symbolic depiction as a lamb, "inasmuch as we comprehend thereby the sublimity of the humiliation of God's Word, and are guided to the recollection of His life in the flesh, His Passion and His salutary Death, and the redemption which has thence accrued to the world."⁶⁵³ Both of these initiatives, from the political and ecclesiastical authorities, do not address the question of the worship of images.⁶⁵⁴ This last point, the nature of the icon, is a crucial matter that should always be borne in mind when discussing the emergence of Iconoclasm. As Brubaker and Haldon have already proven, the definition as well as the dogmatic formulation of icon worship came as a result of the Iconoclastic controversy and did not precede

⁶⁴⁹ Brown, "A Dark-Age Crisis."

⁶⁵⁰ See Kitzynger, Ernst "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm," *DOP* 8 (1954), 129ff; Baynes, Norman H. "The Icons before Iconoclasm," *The Harvard Theological Review* 44 (1951), 93ff.

⁶⁵¹ Herrin, *The Formation*, 311.

⁶⁵² Brubaker, Leslie "In the Beginning Was the Word: Art and Orthodoxy in the Council of Trullo (692) and Nicaea II (787)" in Louth, A. and Casiday, A. (eds) *Byzantine Orthodoxies*, Aldershot 2006, 65.

⁶⁵³ Mansi, 11.977 E-980 B, trans. by Mango, Cyril *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453*, Toronto 1986, 140.

⁶⁵⁴ Cf. Kitzynger, "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm," 121.

it.⁶⁵⁵ Although icons already constituted a reality in the Christian life of the empire, it was not until the end of the seventh century that they started to be closely associated with the person they represented and to the subsequent power that the person could possibly transfer to the believer. Their role as intercessors between God and humans, as well as defenders of the Christian communities and cities, started to be established during that period, and icons gained a place next to the relics and other objects connected to a certain saint.⁶⁵⁶ As Justinian's change of coinage shows, apart from the phenomenon of personal devotion to icons, an imperial manifestation of the intercessory power of the icons was already developing.

Around the 720s, several churchmen from provinces in Asia Minor expressed iconoclastic sentiments and attitudes, the best known of them being Constantine, bishop of Nakoleia, who, according to the iconophile references, was considered the founder of Iconoclasm.⁶⁵⁷ In 726, after a volcanic eruption on the islands of Thera and Therasia, Nikephoros stated that: "The emperor, it is said, when he had heard of these things, considered them to be signs of divine wrath and was pondering what cause might have brought them about. On this account he took up a position contrary to the true faith and planned the removal of the holy icons, mistakenly believing that the portent had occurred because they were set up and adored. He tried to expound his own doctrine to the people, while many men lamented the insult done to the Church."⁶⁵⁸ Following the report of Nikephoros, there was a discussion as to whether or not there was an iconoclastic edict issued in 726 AD, which was recently rekindled by the research of Brubaker and Haldon.⁶⁵⁹ In any case, according to the much later and Iconophile-biased accounts of Theophanes and *The Life of Stephen the Younger*, there soon followed the alleged

⁶⁵⁵ Brubaker & Haldon, *A History*, 63: "What we might legitimately call a cult of images did not lead to Iconoclasm; it was generated by the discourse of the debate about Iconoclasm itself;" Cf. also Auzépy, Marie-France "L'iconodoulie, défense de l'image ou de la dévotion à l'image?" *Nicée II, 787-1987, Douze siècles d'images religieuses*, Paris 1987, 157-165.

⁶⁵⁶ See Herrin, *The Formation*, 307-317; Brubaker & Haldon, *loc. cit.*

⁶⁵⁷ For a detailed account of that period and examination of both Islamic and Byzantine Iconoclasm, see Brubaker & Haldon, *A History*.

⁶⁵⁸ Nikephoros, 129, (§ 60).

⁶⁵⁹ Against the issue of edict was Ostrogorsky, Georg "Les debutes de la querelle des images," *Melanges Ch. Diehl* I (1930), 235-255; and for it was Anastos, Milton V. "Leo III's Edict against the Images in the Year 726-27 and Italo-Byzantine Relations between 726 and 730," *BF* 3 (1968), 5-41. Brubaker and Haldon have almost denied any possibility that an edict existed, see Brubaker & Haldon, *A History*, 117-127.

destruction of Christ's icon in the Chalke Gate of the imperial palace, the first imperial iconoclastic act, which met with the resistance of the Constantinopolitans.⁶⁶⁰ Auzépy has strongly argued against the veracity of the destruction of this icon of Christ, since it did not exist before 787.⁶⁶¹ In 730 AD "the impious Leo convened a *silentium* against the holy and venerable icons"⁶⁶² and following the replacement of Germanos with Anastasios as patriarch of Constantinople "in his anger the tyrant intensified the assault on the holy icons."⁶⁶³

Recently, the above-mentioned established (iconophile) account of the introduction of Iconoclasm was seriously questioned, and rejected, by Brubaker and Haldon.⁶⁶⁴ In their own words, the authors say: "we hope that, if we have achieved nothing else, we can say convincingly that the iconophile version of the history of eighth —and ninth— century Byzantium has at last been laid to rest."⁶⁶⁵ The authors discuss Iconoclasm as an episode in the broader social, economic and political transformation that was under way during that period. In fact, they postulate that Iconoclasm was less significant than the iconophile narrative has presented it. They claim that the issue of icon worship had started much earlier, in ca. 680,⁶⁶⁶ and they present the iconophiles as innovators, introducing the icons' veneration. Following Paul Speck's main arguments, they dismiss the main iconophile references about Leo's instigation of Iconoclasm either as later interpolations, and inventions in already existing texts or as expressing anti-iconoclast biases. They also suggest that there does not seem to be any compelling evidence for the imperial involvement in the instigation of Iconoclasm. Conclusively, they posit that there might have been no iconoclast edict issued by Leo, and that

⁶⁶⁰ Theophanes, 405; Auzépy, Marie-France (ed. and trans.) *La Vie d'Etienne le Jeune par Etienne le Diacre*, Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs 3, Aldershot 1997, 100-101, French tr. 193-194.

⁶⁶¹ See Auzépy, Marie-France "La destruction de l'icône du Christ de la Chalcé par Léon III: Propagande ou réalité?," *Byzantion* 60 (1990), 445-449. Her argument has been followed also by Brubaker & Haldon, *A History*, 128-134.

⁶⁶² Theophanes, 408-409.

⁶⁶³ Theophanes, 409. For the implications of Leo's iconoclastic policy, see Stein, Dietrich *Der Beginn des byzantinischen Bilderstreites und seine Entwicklung bis in die 40er Jahre des 8. Jahrhunderts*, (Miscellanea Monacensia 25) Munich 1980, 138-193. Stein also denies that any imperial edict was issued in 730, *ibid.*, 201f.

⁶⁶⁴ Brubaker & Haldon, *A History*, and Brubaker, Leslie *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm*, Bristol 2012.

⁶⁶⁵ Brubaker & Haldon, *A History*, 779.

⁶⁶⁶ Brubaker & Haldon, *A History*, 52-62.

Leo “was not an ‘iconoclast’ in the sense imposed upon him by later iconophile tradition, and accepted by much modern historiography.”⁶⁶⁷ They also seem to leave no space for any external, either Judaic or Islamic, influence on the Byzantine Iconoclasm. Before continuing the discussion about the Islamic impact on Byzantine policies, the relative references, concerning the Islamic interference, have to be presented.

The first mention of the view that Leo’s introduction of Iconoclasm was influenced by a similar act undertaken by caliph Yazid, some years earlier in the Muslim territories occurred as early as 787, in the Seventh Council of Nikaia.⁶⁶⁸ But before examining this accusation, a mention should be made of patriarch Germanos’ letter, the oldest —and most contemporary— surviving source, which describes Muslims’ religious practices as idolatrous, and is also found in the Acts of the Seventh Council of Nikaia of 787. In it, Germanos refers to Jewish accusations that Christians are idol-worshippers, he then returns these accusations, calling the Jews “true worshippers of idols,” and he adds that the Saracens also seem to hit upon something similar, since “they, up to our own days, venerate in the desert an inanimate stone, which is called Khobar.”⁶⁶⁹ This letter clearly outlines the Byzantine view that the Jews and the Arabs were the real idolaters, (which actually is a polemic response against Jews and Arabs, who accused the Christian Byzantines of idol-worshipping).

In the Acts of the same Council, the important report of the presbyter John of Jerusalem can be found. John was the representative of the bishops of the Eastern patriarchal thrones and his report refers to the introduction of Iconoclasm to Jewish and Arabian influence. This report also contains the first mention of Yazid’s edict against icons and was read by John, at the fifth session of the Council: “On Omar’s death, Ezid, a man of frivolous and unstable turn of mind, succeeded him. There lived a certain man at Tiberias, a ringleader of the lawless Jews, a magician and fortune-teller, an instrument of soul-destroying demons, whose name was Tessarakontapechys, a bitter enemy

⁶⁶⁷ Brubaker & Haldon, *A History*, 155. For a shorter account, see Brubaker, *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 9-29.

⁶⁶⁸ For this edict, see Vasiliev, Alexander A. “The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A. D. 721,” *DOP* 9 (1956), 23-47.

⁶⁶⁹ Mansi, 13.109 D-E. See also the relevant discussion in Herrin, *The Formation*, 332-333.

of the Church of God. On learning of the frivolity of the ruler Yazid, this most-wicked Jew approached him and attempted to utter prophecies ... saying: 'You will remain thirty years in this your kingship if you follow my advice.' That foolish tyrant, yearning for a long life (for he was self indulgent and dissolute) answered: 'Whatever you say, I am ready to do, and, if I attain my desire, I will repay you with highest honours.' Then the Jewish magician said to him: 'Order immediately, without any delay or postponement, that an encyclical letter be issued throughout your empire to the effect that every representational painting [*pasan eikoniken diazografesin*], whether on tablets or in wall-mosaics, on sacred vessels or on altar coverings, and all such objects as are found in Christian churches, be destroyed and thoroughly abolished, nay also representations of all kinds [*hoiade pote*] that adorn and embellish the market places of cities. And moved by satanic wickedness, the false prophet added: 'every likeness,' contriving thereby to make unsuspected [*anyforaton*] his hostility against us. The wretched tyrant, yielding most readily to this advice, sent [officials] and destroyed the holy icons and all other representations in every province under his rule, and, because of the Jewish magician, thus ruthlessly robbed the churches of God under his sway of all ornaments, before the evil came into this land. As the God-loving Christians fled, lest they should have to overthrow the holy images with their own hands, the emirs who were sent for this purpose pressed into service abominable Jews and wretched Arabs; and thus they burned the venerable icons, and either smeared or scraped the ecclesiastical buildings. On hearing this, the pseudo-bishop of Nakoleia and his followers imitated the lawless Jews and impious Arabs, outraging the churches of God ... When, after doing this, the caliph [*symboulos*] Ezid died, no more than two and a half years later, and went into the everlasting fire, the images were restored to their original position and honour. His son Walid filled with indignation, ordered the magician to be ignominiously put to death for his father's murder, as just punishment for his false prophecy." The bishop of Messana, present at the same Council, corroborated John's report: "I was a boy in Syria when the caliph of the Saracens was destroying the icons."⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁷⁰ Mansi, 13.197B-200B. I follow Vasiliev's translation, *ibid.*, 28-30.

Almost the same report about Yazid's edict concerning the destruction of images due to the influence of a Jew is also found in Theophanes,⁶⁷¹ as it is in a plethora of accounts from Syriac (Michael the Syrian, *Chron.* 1234, and *Chron.* 819, Chron. Zuqnin),⁶⁷² Armenian, Arabic (of late tenth and eleventh century though), even Latin sources;⁶⁷³ and it has been dated around 721.⁶⁷⁴ However, it has to be said that the edict is mentioned only by Christian sources, while Muslim sources are later and derive from the Christian ones. The only, curious, exception to this, seems to be an early Islamic apocalyptic chronicle, found in Nu'aym ibn Ḥammād's *Kitāb al-fitan*, which refers to Yazid as the demolisher of the buildings (*hādīm al-bunyān*) and destroyer of the images (*mughayyir al-ṣuwar*).⁶⁷⁵ The authenticity of Yazid's edict has been accepted by several scholars, recently however, it has been questioned—if not rejected—due to its aetiological character and the lack of iconoclastic sources, especially by Byzantinists.⁶⁷⁶ On the other hand, mainly

⁶⁷¹ Theophanes, 402-403: "In this year a Jewish magician, who was a native of Laodikeia in Maritime Phoenicia, came to Izid and promised him that he would reign for forty years over the Arabs if he destroyed the holy icons that were venerated in Christian churches throughout his dominions. The senseless Izid was persuaded by him and decreed a general constitution against the holy images. But by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the intercessions of His chaste Mother and of all the saints, Izid died that same year before his satanic constitution had come to the notice of most people. The emperor Leo partook of the same error, a grievous and illicit one, and so became responsible for inflicting many evils upon us. He found a partner in his boorishness—a man called Beser, a former Christian who has been taken captive to Syria, who had abjured the Christian faith and become imbued with Arab doctrines and who, not long before, had been freed from their servitude and returned to the roman state. Because of his physical strength and like-mindedness in error, he was honoured by the same Leo. This man, then, became the emperor's ally with regard to this great evil."

⁶⁷² All these accounts are conveniently gathered in Hoyland, *Theophilus*, 221-222. Since the story of Theophanes differs from that of Dionysius, Hoyland expresses his uncertainty whether it was in Theophilus' original account, *Theophilus*, 221 n. 622.

⁶⁷³ For which, see Vasiliev, "The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A. D. 721." In addition to these references, there should be mentioned also the reference of an Apocalyptic Chronicle, where Yazīd is presented as "corrupter of images," found in Nu'aym's work, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 334-335; and Cook, Michael "An Early Islamic Apocalyptic Chronicle," *JNES* 52 (1993), 25-29.

⁶⁷⁴ See Vasiliev, "The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A. D. 721," 45-47.

⁶⁷⁵ Both Cook and Hoyland say that this reference reveals Christian and not Muslim concerns. See Cook, Michael "An Early Islamic Apocalyptic Chronicle," *JNES* 52 (1993), 25-29; Hoyland, *Islam*, 334-335.

⁶⁷⁶ See Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 59-84; Speck, Paul *Ich bin's nicht, Kaiser Konstantin istes gewesen*, Ποικίλα βυζαντινά 10, Bonn 1990; and Grabar, Oleg "Islam and Iconoclasm" in Bryer, Anthony & Herrin, Judith (eds), *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham March 1975*, Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham 1977, 45-52; Brubaker & Haldon doubt also about any Islamic influence upon Byzantine Iconoclasm, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, C. 680-850: A History*, 115.

the Arabists have insisted on the edict's historicity.⁶⁷⁷ Griffith has also tried to find a possible core of truth in the Islamic story of Bashīr/Beser, the alleged Melkite Christian who converted to Islam and then back again to Christianity, and was made a companion of Leo. He actually suggests that Theophanes' account was a Christian recension of the same story, and that person can be identified with Tessarakontapechys, in the above-mentioned references.⁶⁷⁸ Since later Arabic sources talk about the destruction mainly of crosses and churches particularly in Egypt, it has also been suggested that there might have been an edict with local application. While I cannot take at face value the legendary stories of Beser-Tessarakontapechys, I do not find a plausible reason to reject the historical validity of Yazid's edict. Considering especially the numerous testimonies, that also come from such a wide spectrum of countries and languages, from the East to the West, the promulgation of such an edict appears credible.

Furthermore, it makes sense to consider Yazid's edict as the last step towards the homogenisation process of the Muslim Empire that had already started twenty years before.⁶⁷⁹ The implications of Arabisation and Islamisation must have been felt not only at the administrative or religious level of the Muslim community, but also touched all aspects of social life of the non-Muslims. Additionally, the report on the treaties (mainly what has been called *shurūt* 'Umar), which defined the position as well as the conduct of the *dhimmīs* inside the Muslim Caliphate, attest to this attempt on the part of the Muslim rulers to create homogeneous conditions for their subjects, with the prevalent and visually apparent exhibition of Islamic values, symbols and customs at all social levels. The *dhimmīs*, although recognised and protected,

⁶⁷⁷ Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity"; Griffith, Sidney "Images, Islam, and Christian Icons: A Moment in the Christian/Muslim Encounter in Early Islamic Times" in Canivet, P. & Rey-Coquais, J. P. (eds) *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam VIIe-VIIIe siècles. Actes du Colloque International Lyon-Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen, Paris- Institut du Monde Arabe, 11-15 Septembre 1990*, Damascus, 1992, 121–138.

⁶⁷⁸ See Griffith, Sidney "Bashīr/Bēsēr: Boon Companion of the Byzantine Emperor Leo III; The Islamic Recension of His Story in *Leiden Oriental MS 951* (2)," *Le Muséon* 103 (1990), 293–327. The identification with Theophanes' Beser was suggested firstly by Vasiliev, "The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A. D. 721," 28, n. 12, who cites *Kitāb al-'Uyūn*'s mention on someone nicknamed 'Forty Cubits' (not a Jew though). Be that as it may, both Theophanes and Nicephorus report that Leo's companion, patrician Beser was killed by the rebel Artabasdos (Nikephoros, 133, § 64; Theophanes, 414). Theophanes also calls him *Saracen-minded*.

⁶⁷⁹ Cf. Herrin, *The Formation*, 323; Codoñer, Juan Signes "Melkites and Icon Worship during the Iconoclastic Period," *DOP* 67 (2013), 138.

should maintain a low profile, in terms of public exhibition both of their religious symbols and their customs.

Now, turning to John's report on the Council of Nikaia, I would like to draw attention to two issues. Firstly, the Christian awareness of Jewish and Muslim accusations against the Christian veneration of icons (and the cross) as mere idolatry; it should be remembered that the instigator of Yazid's edict was allegedly a Jew from Tiberias. This awareness is also attested by the letter of Germanos as well as by the *Life of Stephen the Younger*, in which there is no mention of Yazid's edict, but the Jews and the Syrians (Muslims) are held responsible—with Greeks and heretics—for the instigation of Iconoclasm.⁶⁸⁰ Theophanes also, when writing about the Arabs' siege of Nikaia, in 727, talks about a Byzantine soldier's hostility to icons and "the intercession of the all-pure Theotokos and all the saints." He then adds that this soldier "abominated their relics [saints] like his mentors, the Arabs."⁶⁸¹ Although his intention is to instruct his audience about the power of icons, as the description of the following miracle of the Virgin implies, he does not fail to mention to Muslims' abhorrence of Christian icons and relics.

Secondly, the language employed in the same report, concerning the images, rather vaguely refers to 'representations' in general: the alleged Jew advises Yazid to destroy "every representational painting (*pasan eikoniken diazografesin*), whether on tablets or in wall-mosaics, on sacred vessels or on altar coverings, and all such objects as are found in Christian churches ... also representations of all kinds (*hoiade pote*) that adorn and embellish the market places of cities (*en tais agorais poleon*)."⁶⁸² John reports that the Jew suggested the destruction of "every likeness" (*homoiomata*), so that Yazid would not be suspected of having a specific anti-Christian iconoclast policy. He refers to wide destruction of figural representations and not merely of 'holy icons.'⁶⁸² This last point surely alludes to the well-known Islamic aniconic sentiments, or iconophobic tendencies, that would have permitted Yazid the mentioned destruction of representations.

⁶⁸⁰ PG 100, 1116B-C.

⁶⁸¹ Theophanes, 406.

⁶⁸² Codoñer's statement, that "the passage has neither an explicit reference to "holy icons," nor even to "icons" (Codoñer, "Melkites and Icon Worship during the Iconoclastic Period," 139), seems to misread John's report into which holy icons are explicitly referred to, Mansi, 13.200A.

During the first half of the seventh century, in the Byzantine Empire there was a growing acceptance of icon worship as well as iconoclastic objections to it. Once this period of the iconoclastic controversy has ended, the newly established orthodoxy imposed its own narrative of the development of the doctrine as well as of the course of the debates and the proclamation of its heroes and defenders of the true faith. A dominant and preeminent part in this narrative is held by the Palestinian Christian community, which is presented as staunchly iconophile and as a guardian of the orthodox tradition. The exalted heroes, and points of reference, of this narrative are Stephen the Sabaite, John of Damascus and Theodore Abū Qurrah. Academic research though, has clearly shown that the works of the Damascene *Against the Calumniators of the Holy Icons* (as well as his total work), were practically unknown to Byzantium, during that period.⁶⁸³ As a result, his theological arguments on icons' veneration did not influence the formation of the doctrinal decisions of the Seventh Council of Nikaia. More significantly, there is only one mention of John's name in this very Council, and this by way of response to his anathema by the Hiereia Council in 754.⁶⁸⁴ Even the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* remains silent on both the man and his work.⁶⁸⁵ Furthermore, Theodore Abū Qurrah's theological work *On the Veneration of the Holy Icons* never came to the knowledge of the Byzantines and it was never translated from its Arabic original and Theodore himself never mentioned the Seventh Council.⁶⁸⁶ The possible solution to these problems, as Auzépy has argued, lies in the role of the Palestinian immigrants' community of Constantinople, which, according to her, was decisive in the construction of this narrative, after the Council of Nikaia. Before beginning a discussion of this issue, it would be beneficial to explore the Melkite Christian communities' attitudes towards images.

⁶⁸³ Neither Nikephoros nor Theodore of Stoudios, the most significant iconophile writers of that period, make any mention to his theological argumentation.

⁶⁸⁴ Mansi, 13.357BC.

⁶⁸⁵ See Gouillard, Jean "Le Synodikon de l'Orthodoxie, Édition et commentaire," *TM* 2 (1967), especially 53 and n. 254.

⁶⁸⁶ Cf. Codoñer, "Melkites and Icon Worship during the Iconoclastic Period," 173.

Islamic attitudes towards representations have long attracted the interest of scholars and numerous studies have already been produced.⁶⁸⁷ From the very beginning of Islamic art, it is clearly manifested that in religious buildings, such as the Dome of the Rock or the Mosque of Damascus, figural representation is strictly avoided, and only vegetal or floral ornamentation and lifeless objects were allowed for decorative purposes. Contrary to this, in other aspects of public or private life, such as the Umayyad lodges and palaces dispersed around the fringes of the desert, pictorial imagery flourished; there was an abundance and variety of figural representations, either in mosaics or in frescoes.⁶⁸⁸ Regardless of the fact “that traditional Muslim culture did not possess a doctrine about the arts, neither formal thought-out rejections of certain kinds of creative activities,”⁶⁸⁹ early Islam soon developed a reluctance to use images, visual symbols and representations.⁶⁹⁰ This opposition to figural representation can by no means be conceived as *stricto sensu* iconoclastic; and in general, it seems that Muslim concern was mainly “related to matters of doctrine raised by specific pictures, most frequently concerning the role of Jesus in Christianity.”⁶⁹¹ Considering though the legal and social status of the Christians under Muslim rule, it sounds plausible to suggest that the Christians of several denominations —and most importantly their ecclesiastical authorities— would have tried to avoid any offence against the Muslims, in their effort to

⁶⁸⁷ Some of the most significant works about this issue are: Creswell K. A. C., “The lawfulness of Painting in Early Islam,” *Ars Islamica* 11-12 (1946), 159-166; Grunebaum, Gustave Edmund von, “Byzantine Iconoclasm and the Influence of the Islamic Environment,” *History of Religions*, 2 (1962), 1-10; Hodgson, Marshall G. S., “Islam and Image,” *History of Religions* 3 (1964), 220-260; Grabar, Oleg “Islam and Iconoclasm” in Bryer, Anthony & Herrin, Judith (eds) *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham March 1975*, Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham 1977, 45-52; King, G.R.D. “Islam, Iconoclasm and the declaration of doctrine,” *BSOAS* 48 (1985), 267-277; Van Reenen, Dan “The *Bilderverbot*, a new survey,” *Der Islam* 67 (1990), 27-77; Griffith, “Images, Islam, and Christian Icons: A Moment in the Christian/Muslim Encounter in Early Islamic Times,” 121-138; Flood, Finbarr Barry “Christian Mosaics in Early Islamic Jordan and Palestine: A Case of Regional Iconoclasm” in Evans, Helen & others *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition*, New York 2012, 117; Flood, Finbarr Barry “Faith, Religion, and the Material Culture of Early Islam” in Evans, Helen & others *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition*, New York 2012, 244-257; Flood, Finbarr Barry “Between cult and culture: Bamiyan, Islamic iconoclasm, and the museum,” *The Art Bulletin* 84 (2002), 641-659.

⁶⁸⁸ Fowden, Garth *Qusayr ‘Amra*, London 2004. Cf. also Hawting, *The First Dynasty*, 65.

⁶⁸⁹ Grabar, Oleg *The Formation of Islamic Art*, New Haven & London 1987, 74.

⁶⁹⁰ Grabar, *The Formation*, 98, 131.

⁶⁹¹ King, “Islam, Iconoclasm and the declaration of doctrine,” 269.

safeguard the unity of their flock. Therefore, cautiousness is advised when talking about iconophile or iconoclast feelings of the Christian *dhimmī* communities, although it sounds reasonable to assume that several attitudes towards icons existed. The Melkites in particular, might have been more inhibited (due to their allegiance to the Byzantine emperor), whilst at the same time trying to appease Islamic iconophobia and not to break their bonds with the Byzantine emperor.

From the first half of the eighth century, the following churches survive from the areas of Syria and Palestine:⁶⁹² *al-Quwaysmah*, *Lower Church* (717/8), *Umm al-Raṣāṣ*, *St Stephen's Church* (718-756), *Ma'in*, *Church on the Acropolis* (719/20), *Deir al-ʿAdas*, *Church of St George* (722), *Nabha*, *Church* (732/3 and 746), *Ramot*, *Church of St George* (762), *ʿAyn al-Kanisa*, *Chapel of the Theotokos* (762), *Church of the Virgin at Madaba* (767) *Shunahal-Janubiyah*, *Church* (undated).⁶⁹³ The chronological order of these churches follows the dated inscriptions that most of the floor mosaics have. Although floor mosaics have been preserved, there is no hint of wall paintings. With the potential exception of a portrait of the Virgin in the Church at Madaba (as the floor mosaic inscription alludes), in the ruins excavated, only a holy image survives, a seated saint in the Church of the priest *Oualesos* (Wʿail) in *Umm al-Raṣāṣ* (dated in 586).⁶⁹⁴ Almost all of these churches are richly decorated by mosaic floors that depict birds, animals, plants, fruits and flowers or geometric patterns. A striking feature of certain churches —mainly of *St Stephen's*, in *Umm al-Raṣāṣ*— is that the floor mosaic depictions of animated life have been deliberately defaced.

⁶⁹² Egyptian churches are not mentioned because “it is virtually impossible to date any of the so-called Coptic material to the eighth or early ninth century with any assurance,” Brubaker & Haldon, *Sources*, 31.

⁶⁹³ For a brief description of these churches, see Brubaker & Haldon, *Sources*, 31-36; the relative bibliography on each monument is also found there. The main works of reference are: Schick, Robert “The Fate of the Christians in Palestine during the Byzantine-Umayyad Transition, 600-750 A.D.” in Bakhit, Adnan Muhammad & Schick, Robert (eds) *Proceedings of the third symposium 2-7 Rabi' 1 1408 A.H. / 24-29 October 1987: the fourth International Conference on the History of Bilad al-Sham during the Umayyad Period*, Amman, 2 (1987), 37-48; idem *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule: A Historical and Archaeological Survey*, (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam), Princeton N. J. 1995; Piccirillo, Michele *The mosaics of Jordan*, Amman 1993; and Ognibene, Susanna *Umm al-Rassas: «La Chiesa di Santo Stefano ed il Problema Iconofobico»*, Roma 2002.

⁶⁹⁴ For which see Piccirillo, Michele “La chiesa del prete Wʿail a Umm al-Rasas—Kastron Mefaa in Giordania” in Manns, A. & Alliata, E. (eds) *Early Christianity in Context: Monuments and Documents*, Jerusalem 1993, 313-334.

Furthermore, most of them have been reconstructed, quite often using the same tesserae, in order to embellish the defaced part so that it is not ‘empty.’ The iconophobia⁶⁹⁵ expressed in this way emerges as a quite characteristic feature of the Christian churches in the area.⁶⁹⁶ Since a great care was showed when removing as well as when repairing the mosaics, all scholars agree that this damage was done by Christians themselves, who would be the ones to use the churches after the damage was done.⁶⁹⁷ Ognibene, who mainly worked in the Church of *St Stephen* in *Umm al-Raṣāṣ*, has proved that the reconstruction took place just after the defacement of the representations, and she dated this phenomenon as being between ca. 718-720 and ca. 760. The first date fits pretty well with the date of Yazid’s edict, while the period after 760 points to the end of the Umayyad rule and the transfer of caliphal power from Damascus to Baghdad, and the abandonment of Syria. According to Ognibene, the possible reasons for the removal of representational mosaics might be attributed to official pressure from the Muslim authorities, or to the shared use of certain churches by Christians and Muslims;⁶⁹⁸ Christians could have reacted in this way so as not to offend the Muslims.⁶⁹⁹ Bowersock also noted that the existence of these damaged mosaics seems “to presuppose something along the lines of the edict of Yazid.”⁷⁰⁰ Schick, on the other hand, states that “physical evidence can neither confirm nor refute the historicity of the accounts of Yazid’s edict;”⁷⁰¹ whereas Brubaker and Haldon point to non-official social pressure for this phenomenon of Christian ‘self-censorship.’⁷⁰²

⁶⁹⁵ For a detailed analysis of this issue, see Ognibene, *Umm al-Rassas*. See also King, “Islam, Iconoclasm and the declaration of doctrine,” *BSOAS* 48 (1985), 267-277; and Bowersock, Glen W. *Mosaics as History: The Late Antiquity to Islam*, Cambridge Mass. 2006, 91-111.

⁶⁹⁶ The first time I faced this issue was in 2005-2006, while writing an essay on mosaics of Umayyad castles (for my MA degree). Quite recently I came across the above-mentioned, interesting and persuasive in its argumentation, article of Codoñer, “Melkites and Icon Worship during the Iconoclastic Period,” which discusses the issue of the Melkites’ views on icon worship during the period of Iconoclasm.

⁶⁹⁷ See Schick, Robert *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule. A historical and Archaeological Study*, Princeton 1995, 210; Brubaker & Haldon, *Sources*, 36; Bowersock, *Mosaics as History*, 98; Schick, Robert “The Destruction of Images in 8th-Century Palestine” in Evans, Helen & others *Age of Transition: Byzantine Culture in the Islamic World*, New York 2015, 136.

⁶⁹⁸ On this issue, see Bashear, Suliman “Qibla musharriqa and Early Muslim Prayer in Churches,” *The Muslim World* 81 (1991), 267-282.

⁶⁹⁹ See Ognibene, *Umm al-Rassas*, 102.

⁷⁰⁰ Bowersock, *Mosaics as History*, 98.

⁷⁰¹ Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule*, 217.

⁷⁰² The expression is mine. For the views mentioned, see Brubaker & Haldon, *Sources*, 36.

Lately, however, Henry Maguire rejected the view that the erasures of living beings from the mosaic floors were connected to any external decree, but he argued that this phenomenon was due to inter-communal Christian attitudes.⁷⁰³ Maguire, focusing on the *Church of the Virgin at Madaba* and basing his argumentation upon the Acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nikaia, in 787, argues that the defacements were specifically concentrated on the personifications of nature, because they were considered to be promoting the worship of the creature and not the Creator. He claims that the damage was done by Christian iconophiles, aware of the iconoclastic debates in Constantinople, in order to purify their worship and not to accommodate to Muslim sensibilities.⁷⁰⁴ To me, his really artful argument does not seem absolutely convincing, for the following reasons. Firstly, as Shick argued, it does not explain the case of the mosaic at *ʿAyn al-Kanisa*, where the restoration points to “the episode of deliberate damage being a passing one, after which at least some Christians were still happy to have images.”⁷⁰⁵ Secondly, although he wants these enthusiastic Christian worshippers to conform to the recent iconophile attitudes from Constantinople, he overlooks the fact that the same Christians, after the defacements, inserted crosses on the mosaic floors⁷⁰⁶ disregarding the 73rd canon of the older Quinisext Council, which strictly prohibits such a practice.⁷⁰⁷ And lastly, because the available archaeological or textual evidence does not allow us to presume what the theological preferences were, concerning icons’ worship of the Melkite Christians of Syria and Palestine, where the above-mentioned churches are found. To my mind, the hypothesis that these defacements were reactions to Muslim pressure, such as that of Yazid’s edict, still remains more likely, although not absolutely satisfactory.⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰³ Maguire, Henry “Moslems, Christians, and Iconoclasm: Erasures from Church Floor Mosaics during the Early Islamic Period” in Hourihane, Colum (ed.), *Byzantine Art: Recent Studies: essays in honor of Lois Drewer*, Temple Ariz. 2009, 111-119; and Maguire, Henry *Nectar and Illusion: Nature in Byzantine Art and Literature*, Oxford 2012, 35-47.

⁷⁰⁴ Maguire, *Nectar and Illusion*, 44.

⁷⁰⁵ Schick, Robert “The Destruction of Images in 8th-Century Palestine,” 136.

⁷⁰⁶ For example in the Church at Masuh in Jordan, see Piccirillo, Michele *The Mosaics of Jordan*, Amman 1992, 253 (fig. 443).

⁷⁰⁷ Mansi, 11.976.

⁷⁰⁸ I mostly agree with the views of Flood and Schick. See Flood, Finbarr Barry “Christian Mosaics in Early Islamic Jordan and Palestine: A Case of Regional Iconoclasm” in Evans, Helen & others *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition*, New York 2012, 117; Flood, Finbarr

While archaeological evidence “does not allow us to know whether the ecclesiastical authorities in Palestina promoted, tolerated, or even condemned icon worship in their respective churches before the iconoclast decree of Yazīd or the outbreak of Iconoclasm in Constantinople,”⁷⁰⁹ it does point to the Christians’ attitude of not openly expressing any possible iconophile sentiments, they might have had. As a result, no connection can be established between Byzantine ‘Iconoclasm’ and ‘iconophobia’ in the Muslim dominion.⁷¹⁰ There is strong evidence though, that the fear against Muslims dictated prudence and not an overt expression of beliefs towards icons.

On the other hand, the patriarchal authorities of the Melkite thrones of the East are completely absent from both Councils of Hieria and Nikaia. In the *horos* of Hieria Council in 754, John is anathematised four times together with Germanos and George of Cyprus.⁷¹¹ There is no mention though to other supporters of icon worship from the East, but significantly there were not even participants from the East in the same Council; something that Constantine V would have tried persistently to achieve, in his effort to give ecumenical recognition to the iconoclast doctrine.⁷¹² Theophanes also, in his exaltation of the supporters of icon worship, talks about patriarch Germanos, pope Gregory, and John of Damascus.⁷¹³ Although a priest or a monk—as the case of Maximus eloquently proved—could be considered the representative of the orthodox faith of the Christian flock, Theophanes’ impotence in this context to offer a name of a Melkite patriarch points to the absence of the Melkite patriarchs from the Council of Nikaia too.⁷¹⁴ Additionally, it corroborates the fact that no Melkite patriarch had openly expressed views on icon worship. And this is telling for Theophanes (with his well-known agenda

Barry “Faith, Religion, and the Material Culture of Early Islam” in Evans, Helen & others *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition*, New York 2012, 253-254; and Schick, Robert “The Destruction of Images in 8th-Century Palestine,” 141.

⁷⁰⁹ Codoñer, “Melkites and Icon Worship,” 145.

⁷¹⁰ See also Bubaker & Haldon, *A History*, 113-115.

⁷¹¹ Mansi, 13.356CD. See also Nikephoros, 144 (§ 72).

⁷¹² The absence of representatives of the patriarchs of the East as well as of the pope, was actually used by the iconophiles as a counter-argument for the ecumenical status of the Hieria Council; see the Acts of Nikaia Council in Mansi, 13.208E-209A. See the discussion in Codoñer, “Melkites and Icon Worship,” 147-148.

⁷¹³ Theophanes, 408.

⁷¹⁴ For his theologically biased agenda, see Jeffreys, Elizabeth “Notes towards a Discussion of the Depiction of the Umayyads in Byzantine Literature” in Haldon, J. & Lawrence, C. (eds) *Elites Old and New in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, Princeton 2004, 133-147.

for orthodoxy and icon worship): whereas he underlines the fact that “none of the universal sees was represented, namely those of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem,”⁷¹⁵ he decides not to mention the absence of the Melkite sees in the Council of Nikaia. The absence of the Melkite patriarchs could be possibly assigned to the difficulties faced by the Muslim authorities, in providing them with a permit to enter Byzantine territory on a special mission, an event frequently observed during the eighth and ninth century. The Byzantines, in such cases appointed certain members of the Melkite Churches, who happened to be present at that time in Constantinople, as representatives of their patriarchal sees; and this was actually done in the Council of Nikaia.⁷¹⁶

Whatever the reasons for this ‘silence’ of the Melkite patriarchal authorities, it is evident that John of Damascus and his defence of icon worship cannot be considered as a representative case of Melkite Christian attitudes in general. In addition to this, it cannot be suggested that he had the approval or the support—at least open and publicly proclaimed—of the ecclesiastical authorities, because, in this case, these authorities would have been condemned (along with him) by the Council of Hieria, or they would have been praised (as he was) by the Council of Nikaia.⁷¹⁷ Concerning the question of the historical connection of John’s treatises (depending upon interpretation of their date), Speck and Brubaker and Haldon suggested that they were written due to the Council of Hieria.⁷¹⁸ Griffith on the other hand, considers this work to be a response to Islamic challenge, without any concern about the contemporary events on the Byzantine Empire.⁷¹⁹ Be that as it may, the answers proposed do not exclude the possibility that the Isaurian policy

⁷¹⁵ Theophanes, 427-428.

⁷¹⁶ Actually the patriarch of Constantinople appointed all the Melkite representatives in the Councils of 787, 867, and 869-870.

⁷¹⁷ More on this issue, as well as a study of the —alleged or real— relations between iconoclast emperors and the Melkite patriarchs, can be found in Codoñer, “Melkites and Icon Worship,” 146-160. For other factors, concerning John’s attitudes and relation to the patriarch of Jerusalem, see also Auzépy, Marie-France “De la Palestine à Constantinople (VIII^e-IX^e siècles): Étienne le Sabaïte et Jean Damascène,” *TM* 12 (1994), 183-218.

⁷¹⁸ Speck, Paul *Artabados, der rechtgläubige Vorkämpfer der göttlichen Lehre: Untersuchungen zur Revolte des Artabados und ihrer Darstellung in der byzantinischen Historiographie*, Παικίλα Βυζαντινά 2, Bonn 1981, 209–224; Brubaker & Haldon, *A History*, 183-189.

⁷¹⁹ Griffith, Sidney “John of Damascus and the Church in Syria in the Umayyad Era: The Intellectual and Cultural Milieu of Orthodox Christians in the World of Islam,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 11 (2008), 207-237.

against icons might have had certain repercussions on the Melkite Church. It seems then, that John's three treatises *Against the Calumniators of the Holy Icons* are representative of the religious atmosphere and the attitudes of certain iconophiles in the East, and also significantly of a strongly iconophile group from Palestine, which, as will be shortly explained, contributed to the spread of John's ideas in the Byzantine world, the consolidation of icon worship, and the liturgical change of the Byzantine Church.

Beyond the purpose of this study, a brief reference should be made to the evolution of this topic, in order to have a better understanding of the ideological procedures that were under way both in Byzantine and in Muslim territories. Theodore Abū Qurrah's treatise *On the Veneration of the Holy Icons* is the other famous exception of a Melkite author writing about this issue during the Byzantine Iconoclasm.⁷²⁰ In it, the author while using and elaborating on John's arguments, also introduces new ones. This treatise appears to be written in response to the refusal of certain Christians to prostrate before icons, due to pressure from the enemies of the Christian faith (who are, apart from the Muslims, for once more the Jews). In this work, Theodore presents icons as equal to relics, offering as example the famous image of Christ in Edessa (*mandylion-mandīl*), which he considers to be a relic and not an icon. Moreover, as has been noted, because of this conception, the word *ṣūra* might have been translated and understood as image and not icon by the Muslims. This presentation might appear as a compromise to the enemies of icons, and show a distance from what was happening to Byzantium, but it also shows a different way in approaching controversial subjects in Muslim lands. In other words, it attests to a shift in tone due to the Muslim presence, regardless of the belief described in it. In addition to this, Theodore always mentions the Six Ecumenical Councils and never the Council of Nikaia, thus suggesting a local context for his treatise. His silence on the Council is interesting, because it cannot be attributed to ignorance since the Melkite Church had close relations with the Byzantine Empire, and Theodore in particular had a close relationship with the famous iconophile

⁷²⁰ See the English translation of the text, Griffith, Sidney *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons by Theodore Abū Qurrah, Bishop of Harrān (c. 755 – c. 830 A.D.)*, Eastern Christian Texts in Translation 1, Louvain 1997.

Michael the Synkellos, who moved to Byzantium.⁷²¹ It seems that in the ninth century icon worship is not a great issue in the dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Codoñer's study has shown that during the period of Iconoclasm in Byzantium, the texts written in Arabic by the Melkite authors show an interesting silence on icons, something which "allow us to conclude that, at least for a significant portion of the ninth century, the Church hierarchy of the Melkites did not try to incorporate the cult of icons, which was surely present at a private or popular level, into dogma, as the Byzantine Church did in 787. There was apparently no need for such a move, which would likely have provoked contemporary 'iconophobic' Muslims, with whom the Melkites frequently debated religious matters."⁷²² It is only after the fall of the Umayyads and the transfer of the caliphate to Baghdad, when Muslim pressure on the Melkite Christians of Syria loosens, that the latter accepted and recognized the Council of Nikaia (in 779-780). It was not until the Byzantine reconquest of the tenth century that icon worship was spread among the Melkites of the East.

Summing up, while icons and some form of icon worship definitely existed between the Melkite Christians, there is no evidence to suggest that the Melkite hierarchy had a preference for or against this form of worship. (Needless to say, due to the scarcity of sources, a thorough examination of the whole spectrum of the possible attitudes towards icons cannot be taken up; not even for the Byzantine Empire). Quite apart from the pressure of both the 'iconophobic' Islamic policies (Yazid's edict) and the iconoclast Byzantine emperors, the attitudes of the Melkite Christian community also seem to be determined by "a string of factors such as the nature of the "images" themselves (holy icons versus relics or simple decorative or ex-voto images), social background (city versus countryside, hierarchy of the Church versus normal believers), ethnicity (Greek- versus Semitic-speaking populations), theological schools (Maximites versus Maronites), or even geography (Syria and Palestine versus Egypt)."⁷²³

⁷²¹ For whom, see art. in *ODB*.

⁷²² Codoñer, "Melkites and Icon Worship," 176.

⁷²³ Codoñer, "Melkites and Icon Worship," 187.

The unanimity of the Melkite Churches towards this issue is rather a retrospective image, which reflects later Byzantine interests and not the reality of these Churches; interests that have been pursued with the help of the Palestinian immigrants in Constantinople. According to Mango, Auzépy, and recently Codoñer, the itinerary of the Palestinian immigrants (and their ideas) might be reconstructed as follows. It seems that during the eighth century “the iconodules were slowly receding in Syria and Palestine before the combined pressure of Islam and their accommodating Christian fellows,” while “for the remaining iconodule Melkites prudence or even silence was more advisable.”⁷²⁴ The monks that migrated from Palestine, mainly the Sabaites, to Constantinople and Rome, had strong iconophile sentiments and they were possessors of both high Greek culture and their local ecclesiastical tradition.⁷²⁵ Those in Italy managed to introduce themselves as representatives of the Melkite Churches, and to influence the Church of Rome, with their iconophile views, so that the pope was presented as the true champion of orthodoxy against iconoclastic heresy.⁷²⁶ In the meantime, their presence in South Italy and Sicily strengthened and spread Greek culture and learning.⁷²⁷ The group of Sabaites in Constantinople,⁷²⁸ holding as a key-figure John of Damascus and his work, spread the knowledge of his work, which might have been a victim of *damnatio memoriae*, due to his anathematization by the Hieria Council. Furthermore, the Palestinian monks are responsible for the liturgical change of the Church of Constantinople, which from then on followed the Palestinian liturgical tradition (and the hymnographic innovation of the *kanon*). Additionally, this Palestinian group is held responsible, due to their staunch iconophile views and actions, for “forging a history of

⁷²⁴ Codoñer, “Melkites and Icon Worship,” 173.

⁷²⁵ About the importance of the Palestinian monasteries as centres of Greek culture, see Mango, Cyril “Greek Culture in Palestine After the Arab Conquest” in Cavallo, G. de Gregorio, G. & Maniaci, M. (eds) *Scritture, libri e testi nelle aree provinciali di Bisanzio, Atti del Seminario di Erice (18-25 sett. 1988)*, Spoleto 1992, 149-160.

⁷²⁶ And they forged also certain letters connected with the iconoclastic controversy. See Codoñer, “Melkites and Icon Worship,” 159-160.

⁷²⁷ See Mango, Cyril “La culture grecque et l’Occident au VIII^e siècle” in Cavallo, G. de Gregorio, G. & Maniaci, M. (eds) *I problemi dell’Occidente, nel secolo VIII, Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medio evo*, 20, Spoleto 1973, 683-721 (repr. in idem, *Byzantium and its Image*, Aldershot 1984, VI).

⁷²⁸ Which in an anachronistic way is called *lobby palestinien* by Auzépy; see Auzépy, Marie-France “De la Palestine à Constantinople (VIII^e-IX^e siècles): Étienne le Sabaïte et Jean Damascène,” *TM* 12 (1994), 214.

‘Iconoclasm’ ... and controlling the past, by rewriting the religious history of Byzantium.”⁷²⁹ Maximus’s adherents (the usual Jacobite accusation against the Melkites) followed their leader’s path one century after him: from the east to the west, and then back again to the east; yet, contrary to the deplorable fate of Maximus—in an ironical reversal of the history—they were victorious over the heretical imperial centre.

After this necessary digression, with a more complete picture in front of us, we can proceed to certain assessments, regarding Leo’s policies and the Byzantine reactions to the Islamic challenge.

4. 7. Conclusions

With hindsight, we tend to think of Leo as a reformer emperor and consequently to judge all his acts as part of an already conceived and well-organised reformation plan. It will do more justice, both to him and to the transitional period in which he lived, if we try to see him in the context of this particular era. Leo came to the Byzantine throne in an unstable period, both politically and militarily.⁷³⁰ The empire was under constant threat and pressure from the Bulgars and the Arabs; and being a military man, he was definitely fully aware of these difficulties. On the other hand, regardless of his—almost certain—eastern origin, he was a man of his time, and he had his share of the contemporary anxieties and concerns that consumed the mind and thoughts of his contemporaries. What makes him an outstanding figure in Byzantine history is his willingness to try and articulate answers and offer proposals to resolving the current situation in the empire. His military skills allowed him to effectively organise Constantinople’s defence and subsequently to save her from Arab attack. Furthermore, by his military reorganisation of the *themata* and the army, Leo and his son Constantine V managed to successfully address the Arabic threat on the battlefields, for the first time after a century of imperial defeat.

⁷²⁹ Auzépy, “De la Palestine à Constantinople,” 216.

⁷³⁰ For an assessment on Leo and his policies, beyond the issue of Iconoclasm, see Herrin, *Judith Margins and Metropolis: Authority across the Byzantine Empire*, Princeton N.J. 2013, 206-219; see also art. in *ODB*.

Leo is presented in a favourable and messianic way in the Eastern sources. He is seen as a *Moses redivivus*, who saved his people from the enemies, in compliance with the apocalyptic expectations and local anxieties of that period. Even the Greek hagiographical text of *The Sixty Pilgrims in Jerusalem*, which derives from a Syrian original, refers to him as “Leo, of blessed memory” (*ho tes hosias mnemes Leon*).⁷³¹ However, due to his alleged inauguration of Iconoclasm, he is quite differently presented by the Byzantine iconophile-biased sources — particularly by Theophanes after 726. Theophanes presents Leo as the ‘impious’ emperor, ‘God’s enemy’,⁷³² ‘Saracen-minded’,⁷³³ ‘lawless’,⁷³⁴ or ‘tyrant’.⁷³⁵ As stated earlier, the intended purpose of the iconophiles was to rewrite religious history, defaming Leo as the instigator of Iconoclasm and presenting him as an innovator and enemy of the true faith. (In this context, he has also been referred to as ‘Saracen-minded’ *sarakenofron*, due to his stance against icon worship, which was presented as an imitation of Muslim practices and beliefs.) For the achievement of this goal, even ‘prophetical dicta’ of an apocalyptic character have been employed. Theophanes says that in AD 728/729 “the lawless emperor Leo in his raging fury against the correct faith summoned the blessed Germanos and began to entice him with flattering words. The blessed bishop said to him, ‘We have heard that there will be a destruction of the holy and venerable icons, but not in your reign’. When the other compelled him to declare in whose reign that would be, he said, ‘That of Konon’. Then Leo said, ‘Truly, my baptismal name is Konon’. The patriarch replied, ‘May not this evil be accomplished in your reign, O lord! For he who commits this deed is the precursor of the Antichrist and the subverter of the divine Incarnation’.”⁷³⁶ The fact that his baptismal name might have been Konon is also referred to in the *Parastaseis*.⁷³⁷ Although Leo is presented as the ‘precursor of the Antichrist’ (an over-used and rather rhetorical expression in the Christian eschatological —and historiographical texts— it has to be

⁷³¹ *The Sixty Martyrs of Jerusalem*, Papadopoulos -Kerameus, 2, § 4.

⁷³² Theophanes, 405.

⁷³³ Theophanes, 405.

⁷³⁴ Theophanes, 407, 412.

⁷³⁵ Theophanes, 409, 412.

⁷³⁶ Theophanes, 407.

⁷³⁷ *Parastaseis*, 58 (§ 1.2-3).

stressed that, even his enemies refer to Leo using an apocalyptic vocabulary. This indicates the degree to which apocalyptic and eschatological imagination had already imbued the Christian Byzantine thought-world.

With regards to Leo's iconoclastic policies, Brubaker and Haldon in the chapter of their book, eloquently entitled "*Leo III: iconoclast or opportunist?*" conclude that "apart from his (possible) initial critique of images in certain public locations, therefore, there is hardly any solid evidence at all for any active imperial involvement in the questions of images."⁷³⁸ Similarly Brubaker states: "We are left, then, with no clear indication of Leo III's beliefs, save that around 730 Germanos held him up as a friend of images; and that in the early ninth century he was the villain of a legend about the beginning of the image struggle."⁷³⁹ While mostly agreeing to their deconstruction of the traditional iconophile version of the history of the Iconoclasm, and Leo's vilification in particular, I am not fully convinced (by their argumentation, concerning the textual evidence) of an outright Leo's exclusion from any involvement in Iconoclastic actions or attitudes (whatever they might have exactly meant, during that period). My understanding of Leo's policies reveals a sense of strong monotheistic antagonism from his part, due to his awareness of the Islamic claim to the Abrahamic monotheism; at least his attitudes towards the law, and his Old Testament orientation point to such a view. Even the fact that the iconophile-biased sources present Leo as gradually moving to an imperially inaugurated Iconoclasm (from 726 to 730) attests to Leo's growing decisiveness towards this subject; they do not depict Iconoclasm as a pre-determined decision. It holds true that the available testimonies, before 726, show that Leo did not express any iconoclastic tendencies. The seals and coins preserved from that period reveal that Leo did not attempt a change in representations; on the contrary, we are informed that he erected a cross, with representations of prophets, apostles, and scriptural texts.⁷⁴⁰ On the other hand, I find really hard to account for the time that intervened from his death (741) until the Council of Hieria (754) for the Iconoclastic doctrine to have been fully matured and eloquently articulated,

⁷³⁸ Brubaker & Haldon, *A History*, 155.

⁷³⁹ Brubaker, Leslie *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm*, Bristol 2012, 29.

⁷⁴⁰ For the coins and seals, see Brubaker & Haldon, *Sources*, 116-140; and Brubaker & Haldon, *A History*, 69-155, for the relevant discussion.

without any previous development of Iconoclastic attitudes. As a result, while it seems rather implausible that Leo issued an imperial edict, introducing Iconoclasm, it seems that he might have taken certain ‘Iconoclastic’ measures, like the removal of icons to higher positions, for example. However, it should be reminded that the thesis aim is to discuss Islam’s challenge on the the relevant debates and awareness concerning Iconoclasm, and not Iconoclasm as an influence of the Islamic aniconism. It was this challenge that forced the Byzantines to rethink their monotheism in the context both of the threat that monotheistic Islam posed, as well as of their inherited Biblical monotheism. Not coincidentally, similar issues, emanating from monotheism, emerged both in Byzantium and the Caliphate, such as the sacredness of the law, and the political or religious character of the ‘rulership.’⁷⁴¹ Leo through the *Ecloga* presents himself as the greatest earthly authority, in whom God has entrusted the guidance and the rule of the *oikoumene*: “Since God has put in our hands the imperial authority... we believe that there is nothing higher or greater that we can do than to govern in judgement and justice.”⁷⁴² His alleged response to the pope, which states that: “I am emperor and priest (*basileus kai hiereus eimi*)”, has been debated by historians over the years.⁷⁴³ Authentic or forged, it goes hand and glove to Leo’s portrait and ideas as exposed in the *Ecloga*: “he [God] ordered us to shepherd the devout flock,”⁷⁴⁴ where he openly seems to challenge the authority of the patriarch, presenting himself as a ‘bishop’ not of those outside the Church (like Constantine the Great) but of those inside the Church.⁷⁴⁵ It is clear that Leo attempted to vest his imperial authority with religious status, finding support from Old Testament models. Such an interpretation of imperial ideology seems to explain the significant role that the emperor assumed during that unstable and frustrated era.

⁷⁴¹ About the development of the latter issue in Islam, see Crone & Hinds, *God’s Caliph*, and al-Azmeh, Aziz *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allah and His People*, Cambridge 2014.

⁷⁴² Burgmann, *Ecloga*, 161-162, l. 21-31.

⁷⁴³ Cf. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 158ff.

⁷⁴⁴ Burgmann, *Ecloga*, 161-162, l. 23-24.

⁷⁴⁵ Someone here might be attempted to see parallel politico-religious developments with the caliphal authority, but as has been already said, it was the latter that seemed to have been influenced by the former or by Persian elements (if there was any influence at all); Crone, *God’s Caliph*, 114-115. Anyway, this parallelism might reveal the common background of ideas and conceptions that both the antagonistic monotheistic religions were developing.

This brings us back to the beginning of the eighth century. Leo came to the throne, just as the Arabs were starting the siege of the capital. Arab victories over the previous hundred years had already created an atmosphere of insecurity and anxiety in the Christian population. During all this period, the Christian faith was tested by the continuous advance of the Arab forces. These popular anxieties and fears were expressed in apocalyptic terms, in the Byzantines' attempt to answer the crucial questions that Arab victories posed.⁷⁴⁶ With the escalation of military activities, there also appears to have been an increase in apocalyptic scenarios — which not only originated from Constantinople, but referred to its imminent disaster as well; apocalyptic expectancies were also attested on the Muslim side. Whereas the Christians viewed the victorious Arabs as a trial of their faith, the Muslims anticipated the conquest of Constantinople as a portent of the apocalyptic end and Judgment Day. In this critical moment, when both faiths were testing their powers, Leo manages to successfully fight against the enemy, who after their failed attempt to conquer Constantinople, have to abandon the siege and withdraw. Regardless of the successful defence of the city, pragmatism forces Leo to acknowledge the strength and power of the Arabs and to agree and allow Muslim worship (by the Muslim prisoners of war) in a room inside the prison next to the palace.

This face à face encounter of the two political and religious enemies, in front of Constantinople's walls, forced the Byzantines to identify their until then distant enemy and try to respond to the challenges it posed. Needless to say fears and anxieties continued to exist until at least the 730s. Although the capital was saved, the rural populations of the empire still suffered from continuous Arab raids. Nevertheless, it seems that the Byzantine court, aware of the beliefs and practices of the Muslims, was ready to offer its own response, as described in the alleged Correspondence between Leo and 'Umar. Furthermore, the promulgation of the new law book of the *Ecloga*, by Leo marks the importance of the Islamic challenge to the empire's reactions and internal policies. Leo's policies not only attest to his promotion of imperial authority, but to his promotion of a stricter monotheistic religiosity as

⁷⁴⁶ Cf. Herrin, *The Formation* 319, 320.

a basic fundament of Byzantine social life, law and religious expression. Several transformations of the religious character of the empire had already been under way, for almost a century. It is the Islamic monotheistic challenge though, supported by its military strength that gradually forced Leo and the Byzantine court to turn their attention to the Old Testament in search of models and ideas, in order to enhance both imperial authority and the true monotheism of the Christian Byzantine Empire. The Abrahamic and monotheistic claims of Islam compelled Byzantines to rethink their own monotheistic origins, and either to accordingly rearrange their views or to conform to certain —mostly common monotheistic— ideas and attitudes. It also has to be remembered that Islam was challenging the universality of the Christian mission to the *oikoumene*; and as such, was threatening the basic conceptions of the Byzantine *Weltanschauung*.⁷⁴⁷

Concerning the issue of Iconoclasm, and probably pointing to its complexity, Haldon said that “Iconoclasm seemed to provide answers to a number of questions of direct concern to those who perceived the dangers of a world in which both official Church and imperial authority had been challenged, at a variety of levels, by the events of the previous century.”⁷⁴⁸ It is true that Iconoclasm came as a result of the gradual culmination of several discourses and events, and it is exactly the involvement of these parameters and questions that make the quest for its causes difficult. On the other hand, it is evident from what has already been said that the complex phenomenon of Iconoclasm was instigated by the process that the Islamic challenge posed upon Byzantine thought and reality, in both the religious and military fields.⁷⁴⁹

Although Muslim intervention might have been explained by the iconophiles, through the etiological use of Yazid’s edict, it is a well-known fact that the Christians were fully aware of the Jewish and Muslim accusations against them of venerating icons and the cross. Against this monotheistic challenge, Leo and Byzantine thought seem to have opposed the one and exclusive monotheistic faith of Christianity, the only legitimate inheritor of

⁷⁴⁷ The issue of the Islamic universalism is discussed extensively in Heino, *Seeing Eye to Eye*.

⁷⁴⁸ Haldon, *Byzantium*, 89.

⁷⁴⁹ Herrin, *Formation*, 343.

Abrahamic heritage. The forced conversion of Jews (and Montanists) leaves no doubt about Leo's attitudes towards monotheism.

The *group palestinien* that contributed to the rewriting of history according to their iconophile views also brought with them John of Damascus' works against Islam (as well as their own knowledge, interpretations and views). Apart from the 'history of Iconoclasm' (as Auzépy wrote) there was also another history to be written; and this was the religious polemic against Islam. The Byzantine polemicists of the ninth century, based upon John's work on Islam, and surely upon information and knowledge transmitted either orally or in writing, produced polemic works of a distinctly hostile and aggressive character against Islam, both in historiography and religious writing. Although they used John's themes and ideas for the articulation of their own polemics, the tone, the level of mean criticism, and ridicule against Islam, had nothing to do with the original, but it was significantly telling of the contemporary Byzantine attitude against Islam.⁷⁵⁰ This kind of polemic attitude however, was destined to prevail for centuries to come. The Melkite Christians, however, who were the first to respond to Islam, seem to have opted for another choice.

Chapter 5

5. The Melkites' response to Islam

5. 1. The Christian 'Melkite' community in the 'World of Islam'

It would appear that from the beginning of the eighth century, the Christians of the occupied territories of the Middle East realised that the Arab conquerors were there to stay and establish their rule and authority upon the conquered populations. Furthermore, it seems that from the ascent of the Marwanids to the rule, the Christians became conscious "of the emergence of a new and distinctive Arab Muslim state and culture from what had begun as,

⁷⁵⁰ See the presentation of Byzantine polemics against Islam in Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'Islam*, and idem, *Polémique byzantine contre l'Islam*.

in some ways, a Byzantine or Sasanid successor state.”⁷⁵¹ In other words, it was evident that the conquerors did not form just a separate ethnic group but that their beliefs and practices constituted a distinct religious faith as well;⁷⁵² and this faith was not just a heterodox or heretical deviation from Christianity. This fact was gradually comprehended as such, through a series of significant events and procedures, that mostly took place during the period of ‘Abd al-Malik’s and al-Walīd’s rule, which enforced and strengthened the process of what modern scholars call Arabisation and Islamisation:⁷⁵³ The construction of the Dome of the Rock, with its symbolic appropriation of the land⁷⁵⁴ and its cosmological and eschatological allusions,⁷⁵⁵ upon the spiritual navel of Christian geography; the construction of the mosque of Damascus, which incorporated St John’s cathedral; the changes in administration, concerning the Arabisation of the *dīwān* and the introduction of Arabic as the only official language of the Caliphate’s administration; the minting and the circulation of a specifically Muslim coinage, upon which the proclamation of the One God was accompanied by that of Muḥammad as his Messenger (*rasūl Allāh*). Thus, the establishment of what Wellhausen called *Das arabische Reich*⁷⁵⁶ was made apparent to the everyday life of the Greek, Arabic, Coptic, and Syriac speaking Christian (as well as Jewish) populations of the previously Byzantine provinces of the Middle East.

After the conquests, the Christian inhabitants, like all other religious groups of the conquered lands (Jews and Zoroastrians), found themselves under the hospitality and protection of the Arab Muslim community, as *ahl al-*

⁷⁵¹ See Wiet, Gaston “L’empire néo-byzantin des Omeyyades et l’empire néo-Sassanide des Abbassides,” *Cahiers d’histoire mondiale* 1 (1953), 63-71; See Hawting, Gerard R. *The first Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661-750*, London 1986, 2000, 66.

⁷⁵² See Heilo, Olof *Seeing Eye to Eye: Islamic Universalism in the Roman and Byzantine Worlds, 7th to 10th Centuries*, Ph.D. Dissertation at the University of Vienna, Wien 2010, 100.

⁷⁵³ For a coherent explanation of these terms, see Hawting, *The First Dynasty*, 1-11.

⁷⁵⁴ See Grabar, Oleg “The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem,” *Ars Orientalis* 3 (1959), 33-62, esp. 57 ff; and Grabar, Oleg *The Formation of Islamic Art*, New Haven & London 1973; 1987, 46-63.

⁷⁵⁵ See the various contributions on the volume: Raby, J. & Johns, J. (eds) *Bayt al-Maqdis: Abd al-Malik’s Jerusalem*, Part I, Oxford 1992.

⁷⁵⁶ Wellhausen, Julius *Das arabische Reich und seine Sturz*, Berlin 1902; For the English translation see Wellhausen, Julius *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall*, (trans. by Margaret Graham Weir), London 1973.

dhimma,⁷⁵⁷ second-class citizens; in return they had to recognise the domination of Islam, to pay a personal tax (*al-jizya*),⁷⁵⁸ and to maintain a low social profile. It is well known that, the various Christian communities of the Middle East were already divided by theological-sectarian boundaries before the conquest, due to the great theological schisms of the fifth century that Nestorianism and Monophysitism or Monothelitism created. The Chalcedonian Christians of the Middle East found themselves rubbing shoulders with Christians of other denominations, as well as Jews, and enjoying equal terms with them, both in the social and political spheres. Their previous dominant status, based on the support of the Byzantine imperial administration and political orthodoxy, had not only vanished but it had also made their derogatory designation as *Melkites* to arouse suspicions or suggest allusions of collaboration with the enemy of the Caliphate, i.e. Byzantium. Even before the rise of Islam (from the fifth century) this allegiance to the Byzantine Empire and its emperor, as well as their Chalcedonian Orthodox identity, distinguished them by the term *Malkiyyūn* / *Milkiyyūn* / *Malkā'iyyūn* / *Malkāniyyūn* 'royalist' (*vasilikoi*, Syr. *Malkōyē*, Gr. *Melhitai*), hence the name Melkites.⁷⁵⁹ The Melkites were further subdivided into two distinct linguistic and cultural groups: the Arabic and/or Syriac speaking and the Greek-speaking populations. The administrative and cultural elite during Byzantine rule was formed by the Greek-speaking Christians, as their Greek education could provide them with a promising career. On the other hand, their bonds with the Arab/Syrian groups weakened, as the latter's distance from (and contact with) the Byzantine centre was growing. The Umayyads maintained the status of the Greek language as their official language and most of the Byzantine features of their administration until 'Abd al-Malik's

⁷⁵⁷ See Cahen's art. "dhimma" in *EF*². See also Fattal, Antoine *Le Statut legal des non-musulmans en terre d'Islam*, Beyrouth 1958; and the volume on *The Formation of the Classical Islamic World* (Vol. 18) series, Hoyland, Robert E. (ed.) *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society*, Burlington VT 2004. Recently the neologism *Dhimmitude* has been popularized through the works of Bat Ye'or (pen name of Giselle Litmann), such as *Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide*, Madison N.J. 2002.

⁷⁵⁸ See Cahen's art. "jizya" in *EF*².

⁷⁵⁹ For a recent, bibliographically updated, discussion on the formation of the historical identity and the legacy of the Melkite community in the Arab world, see also Monferrer-Sala, Juan Pedro "Between Hellenism and Arabicization. On the Formation of an Ethnolinguistic Identity of the Melkite Communities in the Heart of Muslim Rule," *Al-Qanṭara* 33 (2012), 445-471.

policies of Arabisation and Islamisation.⁷⁶⁰ Talking of the Umayyads, Gabrielli said that “they considered themselves at the same time the enemies, the competitors and the potential heirs of the Byzantine Empire.”⁷⁶¹ In several aspects, the early Umayyad Caliphate has been described as a “succession state” of the East Roman Empire.⁷⁶² As a result, the Greek-speaking Christians were preferred to the high administrative positions of the Umayyad Caliphate, due to both their education and their experience in the former Byzantine administration. Even under Arab rule, the situation of each religious community still differed. Besides the introduction of Arabic as the official language, at the expense of Greek,⁷⁶³ the Marwanid policies that accompanied this change forced the Greek-speaking Christians to give up their high positions in the caliphal administration and find a place among the *dhimmīs* in the quickly transforming religious landscape of the Middle East.

Originally, the agreements between the conquering Arabs and the conquered populations described their mutual rights and obligations, without any attempt to curtail the civil liberties of the *dhimmī* groups. However, the situation changed under ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-Aziz (717-720). With the growing assertion of Muslim religious identity and the agitation for the assimilation of all Muslims into an equal status in the Muslim social and political order, certain rulers found the chance to impose restrictions on the rights that the *dhimmīs* had enjoyed until then. Recently Milka Levy-Rubin persuasively argued that “most of the restrictions [imposed to *dhimmīs*] originated in rules and customs that were prevalent in Byzantine and Sasanian societies,” claiming that the *shurūt* ‘Umar —the treaty that defined the legal status of the *dhimmīs*— derives from ‘Umar in the eighth century.⁷⁶⁴ Furthermore, she traces some of the terms of this unique text to Byzantine and Roman law and

⁷⁶⁰ Wiet, “L’empire néo-byzantin des Omeyyades et l’empire néo-Sassanide des Abbassides.”

⁷⁶¹ Gabrielli, Francesco “Greeks and Arabs in the Central Mediterranean Area,” *DOP* 18 (1964), 64.

⁷⁶² See Gibb, “Arab-Byzantine Relations under the Umayyad Caliphate,” 232.

⁷⁶³ For the possible reasons of this linguistic change and Arabic’s successful introduction as the official language of the administration see Wasserstein, J. David “Why did Arabic Succeed Where Greek Failed? Language Change in the Near East after Muhammad,” *Scripta Classica Israelica* 22 (2003), 257-272.

⁷⁶⁴ Levy-Rubin, Milka *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence*, Cambridge 2011, 6.

the Sasanian class system regulations.⁷⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the proselytizing zeal of ‘Umar and his fiscal reforms, for this purpose, enforced the Islamisation process by offering the necessary social motivation for conversion to Islam, thus facilitating —or enforcing— those non-Arabs willing to convert to Islam to do so. These changes were strongly felt by the Christian populations and they had a significant impact upon them as it is eloquently described in the references of Michael the Syrian who reports that ‘Umar II maltreated the Christians in order to conform with Muslim laws and because of the great number of Muslims who perished in a vain attempt to take Constantinople.⁷⁶⁶ He records that he legislated the following restrictions: the *jizya* was abolished for converted Christians, Christians could not be witnesses against Muslims, or a Muslim who killed a Christian would be liable for a fine, and not sentenced to death.⁷⁶⁷ Theophanes also reports on the situation: “Umar banned the use of wine in cities and set about forcing the Christians to convert; those that converted he exempted from tax, while those that refused to do so he killed and produced many martyrs. He also decreed that a Christian’s testimony against a Saracen should not be accepted.”⁷⁶⁸ A contradicting view, which does not reveal any pressure from the Muslim authorities but, on the contrary, a long awaited willingness for assimilation, on the part of certain Christians, comes from an anonymous Syrian chronicler from Ṭūr Abdīn; writing in the mid-eighth century, he comments on some of his contemporary Christians: “The gates were opened to them to [enter] Islam

⁷⁶⁵ Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire*, ch. 5, where she claims also that these restrictions were actually of great significance for the Islamic Empire and were actually and gradually enforced more systematically from the ninth century onwards, contrary to the views of most scholars on the field. She claims that “the rules originating in the Sasanian realm, mainly those regarding *ghiyar*, revert to the ideal of the Sasanian class system, which was promoted in Iran by the Sasanian aristocracy, and demanded that an external set of signs—including dress, paraphernalia, and public customs—distinguish between the elites and the commoners. This Sasanian ideal of an immobile hierarchic society, where each estate is clearly discernible through its dress and paraphernalia, was adopted —and in fact appropriated— by the Muslims in order to distinguish between Muslims and non-Muslims, as a way of establishing their own superiority” (7). Relevant to this issue are her remarks concerning the immobility and distinctly hierarchical character of the Iranian society, social ethos and mores, compared with the Byzantine ideology (129 & 168). The influence of the Roman law upon Islamic legislation has been already discussed by Crone, Patricia *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*, Cambridge 1987.

⁷⁶⁶ Though this connection is not found in any other source, it corroborates the psychological impact that the failed (or successful) outcome of Constantinople’s siege must have had upon the Middle Eastern populations (either Christians or Muslims). See previous chapter.

⁷⁶⁷ Michael Syrian, 11.XIX, 489 (Hoyland, *Theophilus*, 216-217).

⁷⁶⁸ Theophanes, 399.

... Without blows or tortures they slipped towards apostasy in great precipitancy; they formed groups of ten or twenty or thirty or a hundred or three hundred without any sort of compulsion ... going down to Harran and becoming Moslems in the presence of [government] officials. A great crowd did so ... from the districts of Edessa and of Harran and of Tella and of Resaina.”⁷⁶⁹ Although this situation was not wholeheartedly accepted by Muslim authorities, the imminent and constant threat (and harsh reality) of apostasy—as well as its voluntary, and in some cases *en masse*, character—unsettled, worried and put the Christian communities on the guard against Islam. It comes as no surprise then, that during this period appeared the first Christian apologetic and polemic works against Islam.⁷⁷⁰

5. 2. Polemics: Defining the other and instructing the self

Several schools of social theory suggest that an individual’s interpretation of their environment, which forms their perception of reality, is a social construction; and furthermore, “this cultural interpretation comes into being in a continuous conversation of people with one another. That is to say: man shapes his culture, and thus his reality (his world) by arguing.”⁷⁷¹ Although most of these schools tend to neglect the role of religion in these discursive conflicts, the above concept help us to understand a basic feature of the polemic works under consideration. Their intention to interpret the reality of

⁷⁶⁹ Trans. of Segal, J. B. *Edessa, ‘The Blessed City’* (Oxford 1970), 206, from J.B. Chabot, *Incerti Auctoris Chronicon Pseudo-Dionysian um vulgo Dictum* (CSCO, vol. 104, Louvain 1952), 381-385 (I borrowed this reference from Griffith, Sidney “Chapter ten of the *Scholion*: Theodore Bar Kôni’s Apology for Christianity,” *OCP* 47 (1981), 158). Such attitudes point also to possible reasons for conversions, like the need for social assimilation to the new religio-political regime.

⁷⁷⁰ See Griffith, Sidney H. “Comparative Religion in the Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians” now in idem, *The Beginning of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, Aldershot 2002, 63.

⁷⁷¹ See ter Borg, Meerten B. “The Social Importance of Religious Polemics” in Hetteema, T.L. & van der Kooij, A. (eds) *Religious Polemics in Context: Papers presented to the Second International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR) held at Leiden, 27-28 April 2000*, Assen 2004, 433. This volume is one of the most recent academic contributions on the issue of religious polemics, and apart from theoretical issues, it addresses questions and problems met in all religious polemics from the ancient Israel to our days. Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence seems to be helpful in explaining how language might transfer power; see Bourdieu, Pierre *Language and Symbolic Power* (trans. by Matthew Adamson), Cambridge 1991.

‘the other’ leads subsequently to the understanding and (re)defining of themselves, through this interpretation.

Although these works were inspired by the exigencies of that period, the attitudes they express had been formulated and developed over a long period of contacts and verbal conflicts between the religious combatants; in other words they reflect real debates and arguments appearing in the interconfessional discussions between the different religious groups. Themes for debate, arguments and refutations were presented by one group objecting to the other, in their strife to prevail by opposing the offender in such a way, that they might defend the validity of their own faith and argumentation. Having said this, it should be underlined that the existing works by no means constitute records of the real discussions that were taking place; they rather transfer argumentation or concerns that had previously been attested to in the field, and occasionally by the same authors.⁷⁷² All the participants in these polemic/apologetic disputes from the eighth to the tenth century, whether Christians, Jews or Muslims, developed their argumentation based on the same intellectual grounds: “the scriptures, authenticated traditions and dialectical reasoning based upon categorical definitions,” and it is the latter one that “enabled the debate to cross the sectarian lines” as Hoyland remarks.⁷⁷³

When talking about polemics and/or apologetics it should be noted that the polemic treatises being examined do not seem to constitute a literature genre, but rather a religious or intellectual attitude, which expresses itself through a variety of forms of discourse.⁷⁷⁴ Secondly, the boundaries between polemics and apologetics are not distinctly shaped and clear-cut, but the two actually intermingle most of the time because of the purposes, aims and targets of the

⁷⁷² On the issue of disputations between different religious groups see: Cameron, Averil “Disputations, Polemical Literature and the Formation of Opinion in the Early Byzantine Period,” Reinink, G.J. & Vanstiphout, H.L.J. (eds) *Dispute poems and dialogues in the ancient and mediaeval Near East: forms and types of literary debates in Semitic and related literatures*, Leuven 1991, 91-108; Griffith, H. Sidney “Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts: from Patriarch John (d. 648) to Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286)” in Lewis, Bernard & Niewöhner, Friedrich (eds) *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, Wiesbaden 1992, 251-382. Cf. also Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 457.

⁷⁷³ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 456.

⁷⁷⁴ See Argyriou, Astérios “Éléments biographiques concernant le prophète Muḥammad dans la littérature grecque des trois premiers siècles de l’Hégire” in Toufic, Fahd (ed.) *La vie de prophète Mahomet* (Colloque de Strasbourg, Octobre 1980), Paris 1983, 159.

authors of the these works. As mentioned above, the emergence of these attitudes towards Islam was due to the fear of mass conversions. Consequently they were addressed to the Christian flock, who had to be safeguarded against any possible influence the new religion might have upon them. In order to achieve this aim, the authors had to persuade the Christians about the validity of their faith as well as about the false doctrine that Islam professed, by making ample and suitable use of the three above-mentioned intellectual weapons; polemical writing was mainly —but not exclusively— for internal consumption.⁷⁷⁵ It goes without saying that this tedious task also demanded certain methods, literature devices, ways of expression and rhetorical schemes that could correspond to the cultural and intellectual needs of the audience and simultaneously motivate them both intellectually and emotionally so as to steadfastly hold on to their own religion, and avoid any innovation. Finally, these works could be used for the instruction or catechesis of the Christian flock, exposing the true faith, while defining the separating lines between the Christian religion and Islamic beliefs.

Texts carry authority and can be used as weapons as Cameron has convincingly argued;⁷⁷⁶ and polemic attitudes flourished in the Byzantine “dark century” between the various Christian denominations. Thus, instruction on orthodoxy proceeded by means of polemics, and correct belief was defined by fighting against what was perceived to be wrong. Frequent debates and disputations, techniques connected to citations and exegesis of the proof texts, florilegia, production of heresiological catalogues which show development of belief-systems and their classification, also have as their scope the catechesis: because of this, their instructive form is mainly questions and answers. These attitudes are connected to the attempts of the state, society, and the Church to control deviation. In this case, deviations could be perceived all the “others,” be they heretics, pagans, Jews, or Muslims, which fell into the stereotype category of the “bad guy”. This sharp

⁷⁷⁵ See also Sahas, Daniel J. “The Art And Non-Art of Byzantine Polemics: Patterns of Refutation in Byzantine Anti-Islamic Literature” in Gervers, Michael & Bikhazi, Ramzi Jibran (eds) *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 1990, 57.

⁷⁷⁶ Cameron, Averil “Texts as Weapons: Polemic in the Byzantine Dark Ages” in Bowman, Alan & Wolf, Greg (eds) *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, Cambridge 1994, 198-215.

definition of opposition and linear, homogeneous, view of orthodoxy lead the contemporary Byzantines to understand and interpret their own world as an (imagined) world of certainties and strong, impenetrable boundaries. Actually though, religious groups by —and apart from— defining the ‘other,’ unconsciously redefined themselves. This happened because polemics might have been a way of defining new groups that appear in the historical scene (or defining already existing ones), in an age of change and upheaval, but at the same time they have been a way of reformulating knowledge when the old norms and models were vanishing or being disrupted.⁷⁷⁷ Lastly, it should not be forgotten that negative attitudes towards Islam, apart from having responded to the practical and theological needs and formations of the Church, would also decisively serve the reassurance and strengthening of the political orthodoxy of the Byzantine state in years to come. The work that was inarguably destined to exercise the greatest influence upon the later Byzantine polemics was that of John of Damascus. His references to Islam constitute the sole Greek —more or less— complete and comprehensive report of Byzantine views on Islam, from a member of the Melkite community in the Middle East; and it is upon this work that we will now focus.

5. 3. John of Damascus and the ‘Heresy of the Ishmaelites’,⁷⁷⁸

St John of Damascus is recognised as one of the great Church fathers, who exposed in a systematic way Greek Orthodox theology and faith in his work *Pege gnoseos (Fount of Knowledge)*; he is also praised for being a significant and innovative hymnographer, and highly venerated as a staunch defender of holy icons against the Iconoclasts. However, very few things about his life are known with certainty; “in fact, we know far more about the times of St John Damascene than about the events of his own life, and closer scrutiny of the

⁷⁷⁷ See Cameron, “Texts as Weapons.”

⁷⁷⁸ Main works of reference, apart from the critical edition of his work by Kotter, Bonifatius *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, 5 Bände, Berlin 1969-1988, are: Nasrallah, J. *Saint Jean de Damas, son époque —sa vie— son œuvre*, Harissa 1950; Sahas, Daniel *John of Damascus on Islam, the “Heresy of the Ishmaelites,”* Leiden 1972; Le Coz, Raymond *Jean Damascène: Écrits sur l’Islam*, (Sources Chrétiennes), Paris 1992; and Louth, Andrew *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology*, New York 2009². For the study of the Damascene’s work, I use the critical edition of Kotter, following Le Coz, *Jean Damascène*. See also Cameron’s Review of Le Coz’s work, Cameron, Averil “John of Damascus: *Écrits sur l’Islam*, ed. R. Le Coz (Book Review),” *JTS* 46 (1995), 368-372.

sources in recent scholarship has only eroded the few fixed points that were thought to exist, without providing others.”⁷⁷⁹ This lack of information makes “a proper assessment of his writings” difficult,⁷⁸⁰ and has led to opposing views, concerning John’s personality. Sahas suggested that he was a “Syrian Arab”,⁷⁸¹ raised in an Arab milieu, while Meyendorff argued that “in mind and in heart John still lives in Byzantium”.⁷⁸² Our attempt to address this difficulty necessitates a detailed reference to John’s biographical details.

The main source of information about John’s life is an Arabic *Vita*,⁷⁸³ most probably from the ninth century,⁷⁸⁴ while the Greek translation of the Arabic original, from the tenth century, and three shorter narratives from the eleventh to thirteen centuries, do not greatly contribute to our knowledge about John’s biography.⁷⁸⁵ Since all these sources belong to the hagiographical genre, and inevitably follow this genre’s conventions, they offer fictionalised versions of John’s life, causing historians more problems. Apart from these texts, there are also some complementary references from Greek and Eastern Christian Syriac sources about his family and the age and cultural milieu in which he lived. The first reference to him comes from the anathematisation of the Council of Hieria in 754, where he is called *manṣūr* (victorious), which, according to Theophanes, was his patronymic and which also —according to the same author— was replaced by the word *Manzeros* (Hebrew for bastard), a name used for him by the iconoclast emperor Constantine V.⁷⁸⁶ He belongs to the family of Manṣūr, of which Manṣūr ibn

⁷⁷⁹ Louth, Andrew *St John Damascene*, New York 2009², 3.

⁷⁸⁰ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 480.

⁷⁸¹ Sahas, Daniel J. “The Arab Character of the Christian Disputation with Islam: The Case of John of Damascus (ca. 655-ca. 749)” in Lewis, Bernard & Niewöhner, Friedrich *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, Wiesbaden 1992, 185-205.

⁷⁸² Meyendorff, “Byzantine Views of Islam,” *DOP* 18 (1964), 118.

⁷⁸³ Bacha, Constantine *Biographie de saint Jean Damascène, texte original arabe*, Harissa 1912. The original Arabic title is *Sīrat al-qiddīs yūḥannā al-dimashqī al-aṣḥabī tasnīf al-rāhib mikhā’il al-sam’ānī al-anṭākī* “The Life of saint John the Damascene, composed by the monk Michael of St. Simon of Antioch.” According to Hemmerdinger, the Arabic *Vita* is an anonymous work, written between 808 and 869, and Michael actually composed only the introduction, see Hemmerdinger, Bertrand “La *Vita* arabe de saint Jean Damascène et BHG 884,” *OCP* 28 (1962), 422-423; Hoyland, on the other hand, does not find any cogent reason to reject Michael’s claims, *Seeing Islam*, 483, n. 100.

⁷⁸⁴ Le Coz, *Jean Damascène*, 41.

⁷⁸⁵ Le Coz, *Jean Damascène*, 40-41.

⁷⁸⁶ Mansi, 13.356CD; Theophanes, 417; Nikephoros, 144 (§ 72). This word *μάνζηρος* is met also in *Vita Symeonis sali*, ed. Rydén, 163. 12: *μάνζηρος* in *Doctrina Jacobi*; See Appendix;

Sarjun, the grandfather of John of Damascus, was financial governor of Damascus from the time of Maurice and allegedly still held the same position when Herakleios visited the area.⁷⁸⁷ According to Syriac sources, (which are extremely hostile to John's family), this person surrendered Damascus to the invading Arabs;⁷⁸⁸ whereas the Muslim references to the siege and fall of Damascus are unclear and contradictory.⁷⁸⁹ His date of birth is given as 650,⁷⁹⁰ 655-660⁷⁹¹ and 675.⁷⁹² Sarjun ibn Manṣūr, his father, has been described as a secretary of the Umayyad caliphs from Mu'awiya to 'Abd al-Malik, and, after his death, John held a similar position—that of tax collector—according to his *Vita*. The Acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787 (in an allusive biblical metaphor) suggest: "John, who is insultingly called Mansur by all, abandoned all, emulating the evangelist Matthew, and followed Christ, considering the shame of Christ as a richness superior to the treasures which are in Arabia. He chose rather to suffer with the people of God than to enjoy the temporary pleasure of sin."⁷⁹³ It is extremely interesting to note, that according to Auzépy most of the Syriac and Arab sources mention that the Mansur family were tax collectors, a position that made them repugnant to the local population.⁷⁹⁴ Modern scholars have accepted, following the text of the Greek *Vita*, that he held a high administrative position in the court of Abd al-Malik; some of them, like Sahas and Nasrallah, go even further considering him to be a close companion of the

On this expression in Late Antiquity's Jews, see Bar-Ilan, Meir "The Attitude toward Mamzerim in Jewish Society in Late Antiquity," *Jewish History* 14 (2000), 125-170.

⁷⁸⁷ Eutychios, *Annales*, 2.5, 2.13-15; though as Martindale says, Eutychius must have conflated father and son (Martindale, John Robert *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, Vol. 3B, Cambridge 1980, 1137); Cf. also Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 481, n. 86.

⁷⁸⁸ All of them are conveniently found in Auzépy, Marie-France "De la Palestine à Constantinople (VIII^e-IX^e siècles): Étienne le Sabaïte et Jean Damascène," *TM* 12 (1994), 183-218.

⁷⁸⁹ See characteristically the discussion about the siege of Damascus and similar issues connected to problems arising from *futuh* literature's narratives in Noth, Albrecht (with the collaboration of Lawrence Conrad) *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: a source-critical Study*, Princeton 1994.

⁷⁹⁰ Kotter, Bonifatius 'Johannes von Damaskos' in Müller, Gerhard (ed.) *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Vol. XVII/ 17, Berlin & New York 1988, 127.

⁷⁹¹ Nasrallah, 58.

⁷⁹² Jugie, *DTC*, VIII (1924), 695.

⁷⁹³ Mansi, 13.357BC.

⁷⁹⁴ Auzépy, "De la Palestine à Constantinople," 195-196.

same caliph and his court⁷⁹⁵ (as well as of the famous Christian poet Akḥṭal).⁷⁹⁶ Another issue which is strongly connected with his intimacy to the Arab caliphs is his Arab upbringing and his fluency in Arabic, which is also alluded to by the Acts of the same Council of Hieria. In these he is called *Saracen-minded* (*sarakenofron*), insultingly.⁷⁹⁷ His family's connection with the famous Christian poet Akḥṭal has been overstressed by Lammens,⁷⁹⁸ and has been repeated thereafter by several scholars, thus leading to unfounded — or at least weakly supported — arguments about his intimacy with the caliph. While his knowledge of Arabic is emphasised by Sahas and Nasrallah and supported by Le Coz, it is but very poorly, if at all, supported by the sources.⁷⁹⁹ The Greek *Vita*, which dates from the eleventh or thirteenth century,⁸⁰⁰ contains a reference to John instructed to the study of the Greeks' books "in order to learn not only the books of the Saracens."⁸⁰¹ It is reported that on leaving this post, he became a monk in Palestine around 706,⁸⁰² something that could have coincided with the circumstances of the new administrative changes brought by al-Walīd (enforcing the Arabisation of the *dīwān*). On the other hand, Le Coz's and Sahas' suggestion that this could have occurred at a later date (around 720, in the time of 'Umar II) might hint at John's fluency in the Arabic language. Regardless of the important consequences of each suggestion, at our present state of knowledge and in expectation of new evidence, this subject must wait for a more definite answer. Meanwhile, only allusions or hypotheses, supported by other biographical or historical data, can be proffered. Here, I would also like to express a suspicion that this 'obscurity' concerning John's life might have been in part connected with the actions of the above-mentioned Palestinian

⁷⁹⁵ Sahas, "The Arab Character of the Christian Disputation with Islam: The Case of John of Damascus (ca. 655-ca. 749)," 185-205; Sahas, Daniel J. "Eighth-century Byzantine anti-Islamic Literature," *BS* 57 (1996), 229-238.

⁷⁹⁶ See Lammens, *Etudes sur le règne du calife Omayyade Mo'awia I^{er}*, Leipzig 1908.

⁷⁹⁷ "Manṣūr who has a bad name and he is Saracen-minded, anathema. To the iconolater and falsifier Manṣūr, anathema," Mansi, 13.356CD.

⁷⁹⁸ Lammens, Henri *Etudes sur le règne du Calife Omayyade Mo'awia I^{er}*, Leipzig 1908, 384-401 (Jean Damascène et Aḥṭal, commensaux de Yazid).

⁷⁹⁹ Sahas, Daniel *John of Damascus on Islam, the "Heresy of the Ishmaelites,"* Leiden 1972; Le Coz, *Jean Damascène*.

⁸⁰⁰ Le Coz, *Jean Damascène*, 50.

⁸⁰¹ Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analekta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias*, Brussels 1963. Vol. IV, 273.

⁸⁰² Louth, *St John Damascene*, 6.

group of immigrants in Constantinople. Part of their re-writing of the religious history of Iconoclasm was the spread of knowledge of John's work into the Byzantine centre. Thus, in their effort to present a strong Iconophile opposition in Byzantium and simultaneously John of Damascus as the main theological defender of the holy icons, his real 'identity' might have been blurred; but this remains only an impression. Nevertheless, his connection to the famous monastery of Mar Saba belongs to the later tradition and is found in his Greek *Vita* (in the tenth century), written by John, patriarch of Jerusalem, but it is not confirmed by any other source. On the other hand, it seems more plausible that he lived in the environs of Jerusalem, and he was largely referred to as a monk and priest.⁸⁰³ Since the Council of Hieria (754) in its condemnation of John Damascene—as well as Germanos, the patriarch of Constantinople, and George of Cyprus—concludes that “the Trinity deposed all three,”⁸⁰⁴ it is considered almost certain that by that time they were all thought to be dead, and consequently John's death should be put at around 750 A.D.

As previously stated, John Damascene was a prolific author of several works belonging to diverse genres; as one of the greatest preachers, for which he got the sobriquet *flowing with gold* (*chrysorroas*),⁸⁰⁵ he wrote Homilies for several saints. His great talent in hymnography and liturgical poetry contributed to the development and establishment of the *kanon*, which is still used during worship in the Orthodox Church today (*Octoechos*). He is also celebrated as being the most eminent defender of icon worship due to his emblematic Three Treatises against the Calumniators of the holy icons. However quite justifiably, the production of the threefold theological opus *Pege gnoseos* is considered to be his great achievement. In it he tried to present the faith of traditional Orthodoxy, using Greek theological and philosophical concepts.⁸⁰⁶ His 'Summa Theologica,' divided into the *Dialectica*, *Peri hairesion* (*De haeresibus*) and *Peri orthodoxou pisteos* (*De fide orthodoxa*), is an effort to arrange and expose in a systematic way

⁸⁰³ See Auzépy, “De la Palestine à Constantinople,” 199-200; Louth, *St John Damascene*, 6.

⁸⁰⁴ Mansi, 13.356CD.

⁸⁰⁵ Theophanes, 417, 428.

⁸⁰⁶ See Chevalier, Célestin *La Mariologie de saint Jean Damascène*, Rome 1936, 40-43, where he gives a complete list of the authors, philosophers and Church Fathers, used by John in his work.

everything concerning the orthodox faith, and because of this, as he says, everything written there comes from the Holy Fathers and the Councils of the Church keeping for himself just the role of the compiler of the whole synthesis. Of course by doing this, John abides by the Byzantine abhorrence and rejection of innovation and originality. While in the first part of the *Pege gnoseos* the philosophical presuppositions for the understanding of faith are discussed in a detailed way, a presentation of the deviations from the true faith seems necessary in the second part, in order to proceed to the third and last part of the exposition of the Orthodox faith. In *Peri haireseon* (*De haeresibus*), the Damascene examines the heresies that appeared in the Christian Church, following the similar heresiographical work of Epiphanius of Salamis in the fourth century,⁸⁰⁷ but also a tradition that flourished during that period.⁸⁰⁸ John of Damascus, after the exposition of the already known heresies described by Epiphanius adds some other heresies and in the last, 100th, chapter writes about Islam, describing it as the ‘heresy of the Ishmaelites.’ Besides this text, a *Disputation between a Saracen and a Christian* (*Dialexis Sarakenou kai Hristianou*) has also been attributed to John. This, however, is unlikely to be his own work, although, it seems to be based on John’s oral teaching.⁸⁰⁹ It is on these works that I will focus due to their importance as the earliest Byzantine Christian testimonies on Islam, their influence upon the formation of Byzantine attitudes towards Islam after the eighth century, and the theological concerns of the Muslim-Christian disputations that they reveal, at the beginning of the formation of Islamic *kalām*.

Both the authorship and the authenticity of the 100th chapter of *Peri haireseon* have been debated and refuted, especially by Armand Abel, who considered it as an extract of the 20th chapter of *Thesaurus Orthodoxae Fidei*, a work by Nicetas Choniates in the twelfth (or even thirteenth) century.⁸¹⁰ Since Bonifatius Kotter, the critical editor of the work of Damascene,

⁸⁰⁷ PG 41, 473A-544A.

⁸⁰⁸ Germanos I, PG 98, 40-88. On the flourishing of the heresiological ‘catalogues,’ see Cameron, “Texts as Weapons,” 206-207.

⁸⁰⁹ This has been suggested by Kotter, iv.420-421. For a discussion on text’s authenticity, see Le Coz, *Jean Damascène*, 198-203 and Louth, *St John Damascene*, 77.

⁸¹⁰ Abel, Armand “Le chapitre CI du livre Des Hérésies de Jean Damascène: son inauthenticité,” *SI* 19 (1963), 5-25.

discovered a ninth-century manuscript containing the text of *Peri haireseon* and, furthermore, another manuscript from an even earlier time (some scholars date it as being between 750-800) mentions the reference found in *Doctrina Patrum*,⁸¹¹ there cannot be any dispute about its chronological provenance any more.⁸¹² On the other hand, since the material found there was also used by Theodore Abū Qurrah in the ninth century, it cannot be much later than John's time. The authorship though still remains an issue, due to its style and longer length compared to the other chapters of the whole work; however, it might be plausible to suggest that, unlike other chapters in heresies, the 100th chapter seems to describe John's reflections and attitudes to the contemporary phenomenon of Islam.⁸¹³ In addition to this, as Louth notes, in the case of John of Damascus there is a great need for a serious and precise definition of the terms 'authenticity' and 'authorship,' since John —contrary to our modern esteem of originality— regards himself as simply being a skilful plagiarist.⁸¹⁴ Furthermore, he implicitly claims to belong to a tradition of *reading* (of course not that of the individual *reader*), "a tradition that sets out for the reader certain Fathers for certain subjects,"⁸¹⁵ in distinction to the reading of the complete books of the certain authors.⁸¹⁶ It has to be noted here that the *florilegia* (anthologies of extracts from Church Fathers' works on certain topics) seem to have marked the beginning of this process and furthermore, the reliance upon them, instead of the complete books, "contributed to the loss of the original texts, and added markedly to the danger of wrong attribution, even if not actual falsification."⁸¹⁷ Acknowledging the fact that all this evidence does not provide a definite proof, it is highly likely that this work comes from —or has been revised by— the hand of John of Damascus. As far as this study is concerned, it does not matter whether or not John himself wrote it, since the text comes from such an early date. On the

⁸¹¹ See Diekamp, Franz *Doctrina Patrum, De Incarnatione Verbi. Ein Griechisches Florilegium aus der Wende des siebenten und achten Jahrhunderts* Münster 1907, xii, 270.

⁸¹² See Le Coz, 191-198; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 484-485.

⁸¹³ Cf. Louth, *St John Damascene*, 77.

⁸¹⁴ Louth, *St John Damascene*, 26.

⁸¹⁵ Louth, *St John Damascene*, 26.

⁸¹⁶ From the viewpoint of literature theory, someone might ironically suggest that John anticipates the death of the Author (by giving priority to the reader), that Roland Barthes suggested; see Barthes, Roland *Image Music Text* (trans. by Stephen Heath), London 1977.

⁸¹⁷ See Cameron, "Texts as Weapons," 210.

contrary, this issue does not affect the appreciation and analysis of this text as an early and deliberate Byzantine Greek reference (though in polemic style) to the religion of the Muslims.

Contemporary scholars might be surprised by John's reference to Islam as a Christian heresy, but considering the fact that the first heresies described as such belong to the pre-Christian period it is obvious that the term heresy for them, and in particular for Islam is applied in loose way and it simply marks an "erroneous belief or a false doctrine."⁸¹⁸ On the other hand, the use of the term heresy for every erroneous or false doctrine reveals the cultural frame into which John and the Byzantines in general think and function. The compliance with the political orthodoxy is aspired through any *discourse* developed to serve it, and consequently even an inimical faith or belief can be understood only in terms of Christian reference, everything connecting with religion should be discussed in a Christian context, regardless of its relationship to Christianity. Due to this distortive image it seems hard to find the appropriate terminology to apply in the case of Islam. So, he uses the word *threskeia* for Islam whereas he uses the term faith for Christianity.

Chapter 100 commences by presenting Islam as politically dominant and by offering some introductory information about its origins. John of Damascus uses in his very first paragraph (and in just five lines) the three known names for the Arabs (Ishmaelites, Hagarenes and Saracens), something odd and quite unusual. First of all, he presents their religion as an Arab religion. Secondly, he clarifies that the term Hagarenes comes from Hagar (and not from muhajirun, as in the Syriac sources). Third, by rendering their provenance from Ishmael and Hagar, the rejected child of the Patriarch with whom God made the monotheistic covenant, he hints at their illegitimacy to monotheistic heritage, thus denying the Muslims' claim to it. This is supported and enforced by the paretymogical interpretation of the term Saracens, which allegedly means that they were sent-away from Sarah empty-handed.

⁸¹⁸ Sahas, Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 484-485.

“There is also the still-prevailing people-deceiving cult (*threskeia*)⁸¹⁹ of the Ishmaelites, the fore-runner of the Antichrist. It takes its origin from Ishmael, who was born to Abraham from Hagar, and that is why they also call them Hagarenes and Ishmaelites. They also call them Saracens, allegedly for having been sent away by Sarah empty; for Hagar said to the angel, *Sarah has sent me away empty*. These, then, were idolaters and they venerated the morning star and Aphrodite, whom notably they called *Habar* in their own language, which means great; therefore until the times of Herakleios they were, undoubtedly, idolaters. From that time on a false prophet appeared among them, surnamed Mameth, who, having casually been exposed to the Old and the New Testament and supposedly encountered an Arian monk, formed a heresy of his own.⁸²⁰ And after, by pretence, he managed to make the people think of him as a God-fearing fellow, he spread rumours that a scripture was brought down to him from heaven. Thus, having drafted some pronouncements in his book, worthy (only) of laughter, he handed down to them this form of worship.”

“Moreover they call us associators (*hetairiastas*), because they say, we introduce beside God an associate to Him by saying that Christ is the Son of God and God. To whom we answer, that this is what the prophets and the Scripture have handed down to us; and you, as you claim, accept the prophets ... Others hold that the Jews, out of hatred, deceived us with writings which supposedly originated from the prophets so that we might get lost. Again we respond to them: Since you say that Christ is Word and Spirit of God, how do you scold us as associators? For the Word and the Spirit are inseparable ... Thus trying to avoid making associates to God you have mutilated Him ... so we call you mutilators (*koptas*) of God. They also defame us as being

⁸¹⁹ For the reasons previously explained, I prefer the use of the term cult for the translation of the word *threskeia*. Le Coz uses the word religion without offering any explanation of the word's meaning by John in this context. Cf. also Griffith's remark on the same issue: “Given the language of this passage, it is difficult to understand how Le Coz, pointing to John's earlier use of the word *threskeia* to designate the ancient “religion of the Ishmaelites” can say without further nuance in his introduction to the text, “Jean appelle l'islam ‘religion des Ismaélites,’ et l'utilisation du mot religion montre bien que, pour lui, ce n'est pas un simple heresie chrétienne,” Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 42, n. 25.

⁸²⁰ This attests to what said above about the incapability of understanding another faith outside of the context of Christianity. This reference to the Arian monk probably led to the legend of Bahira, for which see Roggema, Barbara *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, Leiden-Boston 2009.

idolaters because we venerate the cross, which they despise; and we respond to them: How is it that you rub yourselves against a stone by your *Habathan*, and you express your adoration to the stone by kissing it? This, then, which they call stone, is the head of Aphrodite, whom they called *Haber*.”

He then proceeds with, on an attack on the Qur’ān, mentioning that Muḥammad “composed many frivolous tales, to each of which he assigned a name,” naming the sūrahs explicitly as the Women (Al-Nisa’), the Table (al-Ma’idah), and the Cow (al-Baqarah). However, he refers implicitly to other sūrahs like the Confederates (al-Ahzab) when mentioning the story of Zayd and his wife, saying that Muḥammad has written numerous other stories, which are worthy of laughter. He concludes with a mention to some customs of Islamic law: “He prescribed that they be circumcised, women as well, and he commanded neither to observe the Sabbath nor to be baptised, to eat those forbidden in the Law and to abstain from the others. Drinking of wine he forbade absolutely.”

With regards to the Christological notions of Islam, being of the uttermost importance for the Christian soteriology, John reports: “He [sc. Muḥammad] says that there exists one God maker of all, who was neither begotten nor has he begotten. He says Christ is the Word of God and His Spirit,⁸²¹ created⁸²² and a servant,⁸²³ and that he was born from Mary,⁸²⁴ the sister of Moses and Aaron,⁸²⁵ without seed.⁸²⁶ For, he says, the Word of God and the Spirit enters Mary,⁸²⁷ and she gave birth to Jesus, a prophet⁸²⁸ and a servant of God. And [he says] that the Jews, acting unlawfully, wanted to crucify him, but, on seizing [him], they crucified [only] his shadow; Christ himself was not crucified, he says, nor did he die.⁸²⁹ For God took him up to heaven to Himself ... and God questioned him saying: Jesus, did you say that ‘I am son

⁸²¹ See Qur’ān iv.171.

⁸²² See Qur’ān iii.59.

⁸²³ See Qur’ān iv.172, xix.30, xliii.59.

⁸²⁴ See Qur’ān iii.45 (*‘Isa ibn Maryam*).

⁸²⁵ See Qur’ān xix.28.

⁸²⁶ See Qur’ān iii.47, xix.20, xxi.91, lxvi.12.

⁸²⁷ See Qur’ān xix.17, xxi.91, lxvi.12.

⁸²⁸ See Qur’ān ix.30, xxxiii.7.

⁸²⁹ See Qur’ān iv.157.

of God and God?’ And, he says, Jesus answered: Mercy me, Lord, you know that I did not say so⁸³⁰...”

Several scholars, including Merrill,⁸³¹ Meyendorff,⁸³² and more recently Roggema (who accuses him of having a sketchy and rudimentary knowledge of Islam),⁸³³ have doubted his deep knowledge and information on Islam. Others like Khoury,⁸³⁴ Sahas⁸³⁵ and Le Coz⁸³⁶ have strongly argued that he was very well informed about it. However, both sides seem to base their conflicting assumptions on the same ground: Islam, as it came to be known in the classical period at the end of the first Abbasid century. Because of this, they mention John’s lack of reference to the ‘five pillars of Islam,’ charge him with confusion about the traditions he mocks as being associated with the *Ka’ba* (the sheep slaughtered there during the Hajj with Isaac’s sacrifice), as well as his unawareness of other verses of the Qur’ān which oppose to his ridicule of the Muslim paradise (although it is written in the Qur’ān that heavenly wine does not produce drunkenness and headaches,⁸³⁷ John ridicules it by asking about the hangover following wine drinking in paradise).⁸³⁸ Beyond that, it should be said here that the recent scholarship seems to accept John’s knowledge about Islam.⁸³⁹

Notwithstanding the striking similarity, or even the identity of the quoted phrases, it has to be said that the quotation of Qur’ānic verses along with the corresponding sayings of John of Damascus might be useful in order to understand the common references. However, it does not provide us with any firm proof that the Qur’ān existed in its current form in the time of John. All these beliefs and teachings could easily have been circulating among Muslims as common beliefs and not been written in the exact form as we now have

⁸³⁰ See Qur’ān v.116.

⁸³¹ Merrill, John Ernest “of the Tractate of John of Damascus on Islam,” *Muslim World* 40 (1951), 88-97.

⁸³² Meyendorff, John “Byzantine Views of Islam,” 113-132.

⁸³³ See Roggema, Barbara *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, Leiden-Boston 2009, 13 & 168.

⁸³⁴ Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins*, 55.

⁸³⁵ Sahas, *John of Damascus*, 128.

⁸³⁶ Le Coz, *Jean Damascène*, 77 ff.

⁸³⁷ See Qur’ān xxxvii.47, lvi.19.

⁸³⁸ See Roggema, Barbara *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, Leiden-Boston 2009, 122.

⁸³⁹ E.g., Hoyland says that “John is well-informed”, Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 488; and Griffith states that “his [John’s] discussion on Islam is obviously well informed,” Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 42.

them; the differences even in the sequence of words is evident in the case of the inscriptions on the Dome of Rock. As a result, it does not seem possible that we can draw final conclusions on the character of the Qur'ān, from what can be inferred from the Damascene's writings. His explicit and direct quotations from the Qur'ān and the naming of certain sūras, as well as other allusions to it, make it clear that the author might have had access to it or to what it might have been at that time a written Islamic scripture. There is however, a strong indication that there was an actual scripture as he mentions a scripture (*graphe*) that came down from heaven. On the other hand, the expanded version of the story of Zayd, Salih's camel and the stories about the stone shows clearly that he had access to oral material and sources or even *tafsirs* (as Wansbrough noted, without accepting the authenticity of the text though)⁸⁴⁰: "some of them answer that (because) Abraham had intercourse with Hagar on it; others, because he tied the camel around it when he was about to sacrifice Isaac,"⁸⁴¹ and that there are "upon it even until now traces of inscriptions"⁸⁴² The reference to pre-Islamic Arab idolatry in the worship of Aphrodite is taken from common Byzantine sources, like patriarch Germanos' mention of that cult (see also the references in the first chapter). All the above-mentioned cases strongly suggest the hypothesis proffered in recent decades by the so-called revisionist historians of the emergence of Islam, i.e. Islam came to be formed as such in a slow development and in interaction of the conquering Arabs to the conquered populations. From John's writings it is clear that Islam is presented as a (pseudo-) prophetic, monotheistic religion, which emphasises the unity and transcendence of God, and claims its biblical and Abrahamic provenance, not from Isaac but from Ishmael. As far as the Qur'ān is concerned, whilst we have seen that John explicitly refers to a Muslim scripture (*graphe*) and quotes certain extracts and names of sūrahs he also includes material from *tafsirs*. The only plausible and cautious conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the revelations ascribed to Muḥammad by the Muslim tradition should have been in a fluid scriptural status, during his time.

⁸⁴⁰ Wansbrough, John "Review *Khoury, Les théologiens byzantins*," *BSOAS* 33 (1970), 392.

⁸⁴¹ Le Coz, *Jean Damascène*, 218.

⁸⁴² Le Coz, *Jean Damascène*, 220.

In addition to the above, it should be underlined that polemics is expressed through various literary devices and tropes, one of which is irony, while others are the disentangling of certain ideas from their original context, and their placement in a completely different one, according to the author's interests and purposes; disorientation, from what is main and crucial for the opponent, to minor allusions or hints that might be interpreted in ways convenient to the polemicist; as well as the concealment or suppression of embarrassing or annoying fragments or even deliberate misinterpretations in order to strengthen their thesis against the opponent.

The main themes explored in *Peri haireseon* are the Christological issue, Muḥammad's mission and the proofs and signs of his prophethood, the personality of a heretic monk who informed Muḥammad about the Christian faith (giving thus an explanation of the heretical and erroneous Muslim views on Christianity), Scripture and its authority as a revealed text, worship of the cross, and the licentious moral code of Muslims. The importance of this text is evident in the influence that it had on the subsequent Byzantine polemics, which adopted the same themes as its core in its fight against Islam, as well as the same line of defence (although with a harsher polemic tone in argumentation). Although Hoyland also talks about the adaptation of tone, Sahas sees in this work a balanced exposition and description of Islam, which does not resemble the following Byzantine treatises. While in part agreeing with the latter judgement, it should be mentioned that the style of such a text necessitates the use of a polemical tone and certain literary devices that might help to ridicule and denigrate the opponent. Although these rhetorical devices and schemes are more fully explored in later Byzantine polemics against Islam, the use of one of them, namely irony, is quite obvious in the case of the Damascene's work, in the description of paradise and Salih's camel: "And if you will desire (to drink) wine from the nearby flowing river, since there will be no water (because the camel has drunk it all), drinking of it without an end you will burn inside you, and you will wobble because of drunkenness, and will be asleep. With heavy head, therefore, and after sleep, and with intoxication because of the wine you will miss the pleasures of paradise."⁸⁴³

⁸⁴³ Le Coz, *Jean Damascène*, 224.

Another common feature of the polemic texts is the frequent mention of the ridiculous and ludicrous views of the opponent without even making the effort to mention them, or presenting them in a ludicrous way; something which is obvious in the case of this text when it states that most of Muḥammad's teachings are worthy of laughter.

When John describes the Christological aspects of the Muslims, he hints at dialogues and conflicts taking place between Christians and Muslims and in these situations he says that the Muslims call the Christians *hetairiastas*. This term appears for the first time and it is a precise and satisfactory rendering of the Arab *mushrikun*, as the verb *hetairizo* means to associate (to be a *hetairos* or a comrade to someone).⁸⁴⁴ Firstly, it seems that in the dialogues between them, the Arabs were accusing the Christians of being associators (*mushrikun*) thus putting forward the issue of the nature of Christ as one of the great differences between them. Secondly, although the term is a precise one, it has been noted by Hawting that it also carries certain derogatory connotations, i.e. immoral sexuality (*hetairai*-prostitutes).⁸⁴⁵ This poses the problem of the language in which these dialogues took place: were this language the Greek one, then this word could have this derogatory connotation, particularly when combined with the abhorrent idea (for the Muslims) that God could have consorts and give birth to sons and daughters. This might have been an ironic response to the Christian belief of Christ being the son of God. Furthermore, it could have been a fierce rejoinder, expressed in a doubly polemical way (accusation and connotation) to the Christian accusations of Muslims' licentious and carnal morality. However, if the dialogues took place in Arabic, this word would only have been a translation into Greek for use by Christians, and in this case the derogatory connotations might be more loose and lax, transferring only the general feeling of what the Muslims might have meant when denying the divinity and sonhood of Jesus. In any case, what is clear from its use is the fact that it indicates a highly polemical style between the participants of the interreligious dialogue where all available rhetorical

⁸⁴⁴ See Lidell-Scott. This term has subsequently been adopted by the Byzantine polemicists and introduced into their texts: see the Abjuration text, *PG* 140, 131C; and in Bartholomeus' of Edessa anti-Islamic treatise, *PG* 104, 1456B.

⁸⁴⁵ Hawting, Gerard R. *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: from Polemic to History*, Cambridge 2002, 84.

devices could be used in order to overwhelm the opponent. Moreover, it reveals the readiness to discuss and refute such accusations, as well as the eagerness of paying the opponents back for their offence. It is telling in this context that the vituperative answer to this accusation comes forth immediately: “so we call you mutilators (κόπτας) of God”.

The issue of John’s fluency in Arabic is also connected to this discussion. Roggema says that John in *Peri hairesion* mostly says ‘they say,’ which could suggest that he participated in the discussions or heard them but he did not read the Qur’ān or Muslim sources (taking as given that they existed as such).⁸⁴⁶ Then, in this case his fluency given is and his immediate and direct knowledge is beyond doubt since he actually discussed people’s beliefs and practices with them, something which Khoury disagrees with. He says that John actually preferred to take notion of the written Muslim sources instead of paying attention to real people and their beliefs.⁸⁴⁷ Evidently then, this charge could function as a circular argument and does not contribute to our deeper evaluation of the Damascene’s work.

That having been said, should not go unnoticed the fact that John’s rendering of the Muslim accusation against Christians, as committing *shirk*, is an exact translation of the Arabic term and the need to create a completely new word hints at his in-depth knowledge—at least— of certain Muslim accusations, addressed against the Christians, as well as to his wish to transfer, to his Christian audience, actual and precise facts and information about it. In connection with this, I think it is necessary at this point to remind ourselves that this attitude and concern to render in a precise way Muslim terminology on their accusations against Christians, can also be found in the work of Theodore Abū Qurrah, in which he uses the term *akoinonitos* (without associator),⁸⁴⁸ or the word *antimeristis* (he has no partner <*kufuwan*) from the Qur’ān 112:4:4.⁸⁴⁹

⁸⁴⁶ Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, 14.

⁸⁴⁷ See Khoury’s conclusions, *Les théologiens*.

⁸⁴⁸ Opuscula XIX, PG 97, 394B.

⁸⁴⁹ However, it is worth noting that he avoids using John’s word *hetairiastes*; see Opuscula XX, PG 97, 396C. For the issue of the Greek translations of Qur’ān and qur’ānic terms, see Versteegh, Kees “Greek Translation of the Qur’ān in Christian Polemics (9th century A.D.),” *ZDMG* 141 (1991), 52-68; Høgel, Christian “An early anonymous Greek translation of the Qur’ān: The fragments from Niketas Byzantios’ *Refutatio* and the anonymous *Abjuratio*,” *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 7 (2010), 65-119. See also the recently published,

As previously stated, the *Dialexis Sarakenou kai Hristianou* does not seem belong to John's works (at least in the form we have it today), although it almost certainly comes from his oral teachings. Furthermore, since it is strongly connected with the issues raised at the beginning of Muslim theological thought, it will be discussed after an examination of Kosmas' work —John's contemporary— and the possible conclusions that can be drawn from the hymnography of that period.

5. 4. Kosmas of Jerusalem and hymnography⁸⁵⁰

It has been postulated by John Meyendorff that John of Damascus lived in a Christian-Byzantine ghetto in the heart of the Caliphate, which preserved "intact the political and historical outlook." As a result his knowledge on Islam was limited and "in mind and in heart John still lives in Byzantium." He explains that this is particularly evident in his hymnographic work, where he "hopes that, through the intercession of the Theotokos, the *basileus* 'will trample under his feet the barbarian nations' and 'the people of the Ishmaelites, who are fighting against us'."⁸⁵¹ It has been succinctly pointed out by Hoyland that the liturgical texts and hymns "lack any specificity of time and place and are suffused with Biblical imagery,"⁸⁵² as well as Christian symbolical meaning and allusions. Moreover, the difficulty in historically accessing this genre is increased by problems of authorship and a more often than not ambiguity of the manuscript tradition. Even so, all these difficulties did not prevent Alexander Kazhdan from trying to explore the political views of Kosmas of Jerusalem.⁸⁵³ This task was actually dictated by the restrictions

challenging re-evaluation of certain allegedly derogatory words from the Byzantine polemicists: Simelidis, Christos "The Byzantine Understanding of the Qur'anic Term *al-Ṣamad* and the Greek Translation of the Qur'an," *Speculum* 86 (2011), 887-913.

⁸⁵⁰ On Kosmas and his hymnographic production see Detorakes, Th. *Κοσμάς ὁ Μελωδός, Βίος καὶ ἔργον*, Thessalonike 1979; and Christ, W. & Paranikas, M. (eds) *Anthologia graeca carminum christianorum*, Leipzig 1871 (reprinted 1963), 161-204.

⁸⁵¹ Meyendorff, "Byzantine Views," 117-118.

⁸⁵² Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 109.

⁸⁵³ Something he tried to do in his article Kazhdan, Alexander "Kosmas of Jerusalem: 2. Can we Speak of His Political Views?," *Le Muséon* 103 (1990), 329-346, and managed to fulfil in a more elaborate and persuasively argued presentation in idem, *A History*, 107-126; see also

that the ‘dark century’ imposes upon Byzantine historians, since Kazhdan has already noted that, “three genres (the ‘three H’s’) were dominant throughout this period: homiletics, hymnography and hagiography.”⁸⁵⁴ Besides the aforementioned difficulties, hymnography in particular, has certain special features that make its content almost impenetrable to historical enquiry. The hymnographical works of Andrew of Crete, John of Damascus, or Kosmas are still in liturgical use in the Greek Orthodox Church, twelve centuries after their composition; and this points to the inter-temporal character of this genre, which, on the other hand, in order to achieve this timeless quality, should also allow believers to interpret or understand it in allusive, allegoric or metaphoric ways. As a result, it had to be based —or rather solidly fixed to— upon the Scriptural texts, following its soteriological patterns, as interpreted by the Church Fathers and the Holy Synods. Apart from expressing the everlasting truth of Orthodox dogma though, it had to comply with political reality as conceived by Byzantine thought. It can be easily understood that these features leave a minimum —if any— space for drawing any kind of historical information about the author’s views, as well as about the period of their construction. Being aware of this hardship, Kazhdan dared to question the hymnography of Kosmas with regards to the possible views of its author upon co-temporary political and ideological issues of the time; and this formidable task, which has been praised by scholars,⁸⁵⁵ allows for a deeper comprehension of the formation of Christian (and Byzantine) views on Muslims, in the mid-eighth century.

The biography of Kosmas has the same problems like as those of John’s: uncertainty, obscurity, events connected to legend and so on. In fact, his earlier biography is found within the *Life of Kosmas and John the poets* in a manuscript from the eleventh century, where Kosmas is presented as a teacher and adoptive brother of John before later becoming a monk and the bishop of Maiouma. From the elaborate, romanticised, and confusing legend that the several *Vitae* present, it can only be assumed with a greater degree of certainty that Kosmas was actually born in Jerusalem (and not in Italy or Crete) and he

his first attempt to access critically Kosmas’s life: Kazhdan, Alexander & Gero, Stephan “Kosmas of Jerusalem: A More Critical Approach to His Biography,” *BZ* 82 (1989), 122-132.

⁸⁵⁴ Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature*, 139.

⁸⁵⁵ See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 109.

was just a contemporary of John the Damascene, not his teacher or adoptive brother. Already by the ninth century he was a renowned poet of hymns.⁸⁵⁶

Kazhdan, by the content analysis of Kosmas' hymns is led "to the tentative conclusion that his system of images differed from that of John of Damascus. Kosmas avoided the question of icon veneration but was very eloquent in his praise of the Cross: the concept of the victory over the Arabs permeated his kanons while this theme left no traces in the Damascene's poetry."⁸⁵⁷ During that period, the new form of ecclesiastical poetry, the *kanon*, was already standardised by the efforts of Andrew of Crete (*Megas Kanon*) and John Damascene's iambic kanons.⁸⁵⁸ Since the *kanon On the Exaltation of the Cross* has inarguably been attributed to Kosmas, it is the main work that has been examined in detail. It is persuasively argued that it is "not only a piece of literature; it is also a political document."⁸⁵⁹ Inside this *kanon*, Kosmas moves from the Old Testament's events and symbols (like the Crossing of the Red Sea), that the form of the *kanon* dictates, to insisting on the Cross and the defeat of the Amalekites ("Moses engraved the [sign] of the Cross and split the Red Sea").⁸⁶⁰ The term Amalekites eloquently expresses the allusiveness and allegory referred above, and upon which Kosmas based the composition of his work; an Old Testament word for the enemies of the Israelites is now used in a more historical context as an implicit reference to the Arab enemies of the empire. Theophanes, for example, when talking about the Arabs, says that "Amalek rose up in the desert, smiting us, the people of Christ."⁸⁶¹ The idea of victory is central to Kosmas' work, "he eulogizes the Lord, who is powerful in battles and smashes the heads of the crawling demons."⁸⁶² Furthermore, Kazhdan notices a militaristic bent in Kosmas' poetry, which is addressed towards the Amalekites (the Arabs) from the south:

⁸⁵⁶ These are the results of the exhaustive scrutiny of the biographical data of the sources, and the discussion of the available academic research on Kosmas, that Kazhdan adduces, in idem, *A History*, 107-111.

⁸⁵⁷ Kazhdan, "Kosmas 2," 346.

⁸⁵⁸ Stylistic details, forms, the contents, and information about the history of the *kanon* can be found in Tillyard, H.J.W. *Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, London 1923; Wellesz, Egon *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, Oxford 1961. For further bibliography see also Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature*, 11-112; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 108, n. 186.

⁸⁵⁹ Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature*, 114.

⁸⁶⁰ Paranikas & Christ, *Anthologia*, 161 (Kanon I, 1-4).

⁸⁶¹ Theophanes, 332.

⁸⁶² Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature*, 115; see Paranikas & Christ, *Anthologia*, 169 (Kanon III, 1-8).

“Kosmas praised the Cross and his geography is oriented towards the south.”⁸⁶³ His geographical scope is wider than that of John’s, who speaks vaguely of the four quarters of the world.⁸⁶⁴ Kosmas, referring to Christ in the kanon on Nativity, says: “Thou comest to plunder the might of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria, turning deceit into God-loving faith.”⁸⁶⁵ In his enumeration of the names of the biblical nations, the Ethiopians, the people of Tharsis (Spain), the island of the Arabs, the Sabeans, the Medes, as well as Babylon (three times), their identification with the lands of the Amalekite-Arabs in the same kanon should not pass unnoticed.⁸⁶⁶ Kazhdan also mentions Kosmas’ insistence on repeating in his works the formula: “Nobody is holy save our God, and nobody is just but Thou, [my] Lord,” and he suggests that this formula can be heard as a refutation of the Muslim *shahādah*: “There is no God save our God, and Mamet (Muḥammad) is the apostle of God,” as found in the papyri of that period.⁸⁶⁷ This formula comes from the Septuagint (A’ Samuel, 2.2: “Nobody is holy like the Lord, and nobody is just as our God; Nobody is holy save you”), like most of the content of the kanons, according to the rules and conventions of the genre. However, once more, we have to resort to allusions and allegories, and nothing can be said with absolute certainty, I found this suggestion challenging, whilst it carries a high degree of plausibility. Once again, the ‘obscurity’ of the texts does not allow further elucidation.

“The Cross for Kosmas was not just a symbol of Christianity, as it was for the Iconodulic leaders, but the main instrument of earthly victory.”⁸⁶⁸ Christ is expected to save the Christians from the deception of the idols and barbarian attacks of the *ethne*, thus intermingling the barbarian assaults and the worship of idols. This is also hinted also at in John’s accusation of Muslims as being idol worshippers, as was shown earlier. Kazhdan’s work, though limited and restrained by reasons already mentioned, has shown that the response to the

⁸⁶³ Kazhdan, “Kosmas 2,” 335.

⁸⁶⁴ Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature*, 117.

⁸⁶⁵ Paranikas & Christ, *Anthologia*, 166 (Kanon II, 60-65).

⁸⁶⁶ Paranikas & Christ, *Anthologia*, 167- 168 (Kanon II, 77-78, 153-154, 163, 169). Cf. Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature*, 117.

⁸⁶⁷ Kazhdan, “Kosmas 2,” 337; for the text in the kanons, see Paranikas & Christ, *Anthologia*, 167- 168 (Kanon III, 27-28, 35-36, 43-44; Kanon X, 4-5, 10, 15; and Kanon XIII, 24-25, 29-30, 34-35, 39-40).

⁸⁶⁸ Kazhdan, “Kosmas 2,” 346.

Islamic challenge, even through the traditional (and not so obvious for this reason) ways of liturgical expression, differed significantly between the two major exponents of Byzantine hymnography, i.e. Kosmas and John. Although both of them were allegedly living at the same time in the occupied territories of the Middle East and following the indispensable set of conventions of this genre, they chose to focus on different issues. Whereas Kosmas emphasised the power of the Cross, and the victory over the infidels, John's poetry is frequented with references relevant to icons. The words icon (*eikon*) and depict (*eikonizo*) are found in almost every hymnographic work he composed, in contrast to Kosmas' avoidance of this terminology and 'indifference' to the issue of images. On the other hand, Kosmas saw the Cross as "the main instrument of earthly victory, whereas John saw in it the tool of the transcendental resurrection."⁸⁶⁹ It has to be noted here that the exaltation of the Cross was a central theme of the Iconoclast emperors; the sign of the Cross was their favourite symbol, something which was accepted by orthodox Iconodules too, although in close relation to icons. While Kazhdan admits that "it would be too daring to insist on [an iconoclastic] interpretation of his hymns,"⁸⁷⁰ Auzépy does not hesitate to assert that his hymns "are not far away from the positions defended by Constantine V."⁸⁷¹ On the other hand, I would like to remind here that the over-emphasised importance of the Cross as a sign of victory, during the mid-eighth century, was the outcome of a long process, starting from the sixth century, long before Iconoclasm. Apart from the seventh century's events and policies (Herakleios' restoration of the True Cross, as well as his and Justinian II's coinage),⁸⁷² this process of exaltation of the Cross should be understood in the context of the anti-Judaic literature and the Byzantine opposition to Muslim denial of the redeeming power of the Cross.⁸⁷³ Nonetheless, Kosmas' work seems to confirm the existence of different point of views on certain attitudes, inside the Melkite community.

⁸⁶⁹ Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature*, 118.

⁸⁷⁰ Kazhdan, "Kosmas 2," 346.

⁸⁷¹ Auzépy, "De la Palestine à Constantinople," 213.

⁸⁷² See n. 471 above.

⁸⁷³ See Brubaker & Haldon, *A History*, 140-142. On anti-Judaic treatises, see Appendix; regarding the Muslim abhorrence of the Cross, see King, "Islam, Iconoclasm and the declaration of doctrine," esp. 269-275.

The extent, however, of these differentiations as well as their distinctive character do not seem to be accessible to us nowadays.

According to Hoyland, there does not seem to be any contradiction to Meyendorff's view that John and Kosmas were living in a Christian-Byzantine ghetto inside the Caliphate, even though they might have used completely different sets of images and ideas in their poetry.⁸⁷⁴ However, their political and ideological attitudes, their hopes, expectations and fears, and their theological concerns, which express themselves through the deliberate and conscious selection of specific sets of images and allegories, attest to their awareness and comprehension of Muslim reality, as well as to their stance against it.

5. 5. John's "*Dialexis Sarakenou kai Christianou*"

Another work attributed to John of Damascus is the *Dialexis Sarakenou kai Christianu*. This dialogue deals with the topics of God's omnipotence and human free will, Christological issues concerning the nature of Christ (if he is the uncreated Word of God, his divinity and how a God can be born of a woman and so on), the death of the Virgin Mary and the relationship of John the Baptist to Jesus. This work is anonymously cited by the majority of manuscripts and it has been attributed in its present form to Theodore Abū Qurrah by several scholars.⁸⁷⁵ In terms of style and composition, there certain problems appear concerning the lack of a logical plan and its unity, as well as several incomprehensible passages (e.g. it says that Titus destroyed Jerusalem with the Greeks).⁸⁷⁶ As Hoyland suggests, in its present state it is composite and though "plausibly constructed from [John's] teachings, it cannot have been written by John of Damascus himself."⁸⁷⁷ Khoury has also expressed his doubts by asking why, if John was the writer, did he not include in his *Peri haireseon* such important issues as the question of predestination and free

⁸⁷⁴ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 108.

⁸⁷⁵ See the discussion in Le Coz, *Jean Damascène*, 200-201.

⁸⁷⁶ Le Coz, *Jean Damascène*, 238.

⁸⁷⁷ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 489.

will, and the issue of the uncreated Qur'ān.⁸⁷⁸ Kotter concludes that, although its form shows that this work could not have been composed or revised by John, its content most likely comes from him. Jugie, on the other hand, thinks that it might have been a résumé of John's oral teaching,⁸⁷⁹ something which Le Coz and Louth both agree with.⁸⁸⁰ Considering the fact that Greek had ceased to be the language of the Melkite Christians by the end of the eighth century, and that the first Christian Arabic apology *On the Triune Nature of God* (which uses the same phraseology and argumentation on Jesus as the Word and Spirit of God) cannot be dated after 788,⁸⁸¹ it seems that the composition date of *Dialexis* cannot be much later than that. Le Coz, connecting *Dialexis*' references to the contemporary theological issues of the Muslim community, plausibly suggests the last decade of the Umayyads (which is the last decade of John's life as well) as the probable date of its composition.⁸⁸² Be that as it may, this issue does not affect one's appreciation of the text, as the last Greek reference to Muslims from the Middle East, and as an early Byzantine polemic as well. So, even though it does not belong to John, since it "is concerned with the central problems that occupied Muslim theological reflection at the beginning, in the eighth century,"⁸⁸³ it should be studied in connection with John of Damascus and the topics of discussion between Christians and Muslims.

The *Dialexis* is written as a dialogue, between a Saracen and a Christian, in the well-known form of questions and answers, which are rationally structured, so as to lead to the intended result. On the other hand, the frequent use of phrases such as "if the Saracen asks you" – "tell him" indicates its purpose as an instruction manual on how to deal with Muslim accusations and

⁸⁷⁸ This question actually leads us to consider the probability that the two works have been composed in different periods. *Peri haireseon* might have been a work of the beginning of the eighth century, when John was still in the Caliphal court, while the *Dialexis* might have been composed by his oral teachings to the end of his life. The terminology about Christ as the Word and Spirit of God, used also by the tract *On the Triune Nature of God*, might hint to that, since it comes from the same environment —the monasteries of Palestine— where John also lived. However, in the present state of our knowledge, nothing can be said with certainty, although such a hypothesis might elucidate several aspects of John's references in connection to the historical development of Islam.

⁸⁷⁹ Kotter, *PTS* 22, p. 422; Jugie, "Jean Damascène", *DTC* 2, Paris 1924, c. 701.

⁸⁸⁰ Le Coz, *Jean Damascène*, 201; Louth, *St John Damascene*, 81.

⁸⁸¹ For which see below.

⁸⁸² Le Coz, *Jean Damascène*, 161-162.

⁸⁸³ Khoury, *Les théologiens*, 71.

successfully defend the Christian doctrine. The first three dialogues (§ 1-5) are of particular importance, as the issues of the origin of evil, the predestination and free will, God's justice, and the uncreatedness of the Word of God are explored in them.

The Saracen initiates the conversation and the Christian replies:

—“Whom do you say is the cause of good as well as of evil?

—Of everything good we profess that no one is the cause except God, but not of evil.

—Who do you say is the cause of evil?

—Obviously the one who voluntarily is the devil (*diabolos*) and we humans.

—Because of what?

—Because of free will.

—Therefore, you have your free will and you can do whatever you wish?

—God has created me with my free will, with regard to two things.

—Which are these?

—Doing wrong or doing right, what is good and what is bad.”⁸⁸⁴

After a while, the Christian says to his interlocutor: “So, since you claim that good and bad come from God, you will prove God unjust; which is not so.”⁸⁸⁵

Later the Saracen asks him what he calls Christ, the Christian answers: “the Word of God.” The author then advises the Christian to press the Saracen further, until he gets an answer about what Christ is called in his own scripture; to which the Saracen replies: “In my scripture Christ is called the Spirit and Word of God.” The discussion continues thus: “In your scripture are the Spirit of God and the Word said to be uncreated or created? And if he tells you [they are] uncreated, tell him: You see, you agree with me; because this which is not created by anyone, but itself creates, is God. But if he dares to say that they are created say to him: And who has created the Word and the Spirit of God? And if he appears to be embarrassed and tells you that God created them, tell him: Before a while you said that they were uncreated, and now you say that God created them. Here, if I told you this, you would have

⁸⁸⁴ Le Coz, 228.

⁸⁸⁵ Le Coz, 230.

told me that ‘You have concealed your testimony and from now on I will not believe you, whatever you say.’ However, I will also ask you this, before God created the Word and the Spirit did he have neither Spirit nor Word? And he will flee from you not having anything to answer. For these are heretics, according to the Saracens and utterly despised and rejected.”⁸⁸⁶

John’s concern and insistence on the issue of free will (*autexousion*) is clearly also manifested in his *Dialogue against the Manichees*, “[God created man] with free will, because he was not created out of necessity; every rational being is with free will. Because, what is the need for reason (*logikon*), if he is without free will? Or how is he going to act piously or become virtuous, if he is without free will? Since what is done by force or by nature’s necessity is not a virtue; so, the irrational (*aloga*) beings do not likewise possess even virtue.”⁸⁸⁷ The appearance of the same issue in the *Dialexis* might interestingly reflect the theological and cultural atmosphere of the early Islamic period.⁸⁸⁸

It is well established that during the first three centuries of the Islamic era, there was an emergence, and furthermore a prolific development, of theological debates and ideas, which gradually shaped and defined Islam’s identity, in the forms it came to be known as after the ninth century.⁸⁸⁹ All the discussions, taking place during that period, mark the strenuous effort, on the part of nascent Islam, to build its self-definition and its distinctive expression and characteristics, in the cultural environment of the conquered territories of the Near East. The Arab conquerors became the rulers of a place where a great diversity of sectarian doctrines flourished, mainly due to the legacy of Hellenistic culture. The major challenge however, for the emergent Islamic theological awareness, seemed to be the ‘rival’ pre-existent forms of monotheistic faith; and especially Christianity, due to its prevalence in the area and its highly elaborated and sophisticated dogmatic formulations (which had been shaped through a long and persistent dialogue between the Bible and Greek philosophical thought). The Christians on the other hand, equipped

⁸⁸⁶ Le Coz, 238, 240.

⁸⁸⁷ PG 94, 1568B; see also PG 94, 1537C & 1577C.

⁸⁸⁸ Cf. Louth, 82, Le Coz, 136-153, 157-158.

⁸⁸⁹ See Goldziher, van Ess, and Watt.

with these very weapons, tried to answer the monotheistic challenge of Islam as cogently and consistently as they could.

While the origins of early Muslim dogma⁸⁹⁰ are still an open and hotly debated issue, it is commonly agreed that by the end of the seventh and the beginning of the eighth century the issue of free will (*liberum arbitrium*) and predestination had already arisen inside the Muslim community. The term *Qadariyya*⁸⁹¹ was mainly used to refer to —*lucus a non lucendo*— those who supported the idea of human free will, in contrast to those Muslims who stressed God's omnipotence and His predestination of events.⁸⁹² While Becker, Seale and Macdonald (amongst others) suggested the issue of free will had Christian origins, and more particularly pointed to the theological thought of John of Damascus, Watt strongly opposed this view, considering that the problem started inside the Muslim community itself, and due to pre-Islamic (either Arabic or Iranian) conceptions of the determination of human life.⁸⁹³ Goldziher postulated the development of religious thought as the factor for the emergence of the issue,⁸⁹⁴ while Wensinck on the other hand, talked about the broad Semitic background of the predestinarian ideas;⁸⁹⁵ though both of them leave a space for a possible Christian contribution to or influence on Islamic thought.⁸⁹⁶ Goldziher made the following remark: “the earliest protest against unlimited predestination appeared in Syrian Islam. The emergence of that protest is best explained by Kremer's view that the early Muslim doctors' impulse to doubt unlimited predestination came from their Christian theological environment, for, as it happened, in the Eastern Church the debate over the this point of doctrine occupied theologians' minds. Damascus, the intellectual focus of Islam during the Umayyad age, was the

⁸⁹⁰ As Cook called it in his study, Cook, Michael *Early Muslim Dogma*, Cambridge 1981.

⁸⁹¹ See van Ess' art. in *EF*².

⁸⁹² See Goldziher, *Introduction*, 82; Nallino, Carlo A. “Sul nome di Qadariti,” *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 7 (1916-1918), 461; and Hawting, *The First Dynasty*, 92.

⁸⁹³ Watt, *The Formative Period*, 88-89.

⁸⁹⁴ Goldziher, *Introduction*, 77: “rather we may assume that it grew out of a deepening of the Muslims' religious ideas: out of piety, not free thinking.”

⁸⁹⁵ Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, 54: “the orthodox doctrine of heavenly decree is not specifically Islamic. It has a broad Semitic base, as is proved by Babylonian and Israelitic religious tradition, which regards not only the ways of man, but the course of the world as the *replica* of what had been recorded long before in heavenly books or on heavenly tablets.”

⁸⁹⁶ Goldziher, 81; for Wensinck though, who briefly discusses Becker's and Macdonald's suggestions, this space seems to be very limited: “the sequence of the ideas is not of foreign origin, but is indigenous), 52.

centre of speculation about *qadar*, the fixing of fate; from Damascus that speculation rapidly spread far and wide.”⁸⁹⁷ Cook finally, opposing van Ess’ early dating of certain documents relating to the Qadarite controversy, persuasively argued that this controversy is likely to be older than John’s time but “it had not yet begun at the beginning of the eighth century,”⁸⁹⁸ and suggested the fatalistic attitudes of the Late Antiquity as the probable cultural background for the cultivation of predestination conceptions.⁸⁹⁹ Whatever the origins of predestinarian ideas might have been, it is evident that the recent scholarship does not offer a sound and clear proposal on the introduction of the idea of the free will to the Islamic thought, during the controversy against predestination.

The scholars agree that the Qur’ān offers views, which can support both predestination as well as free will, and thus cannot be considered as the inspirational source for either concept;⁹⁰⁰ “there is probably no other point of doctrine on which equally contradictory teachings can be derived from the Qur’ān as on this one.”⁹⁰¹ Alongside verses such as this: “There is no way [forward] for those God allows to stray” (42:46), or this: “When God wishes to guide someone, He opens their breast to Islam when He wishes to lead them astray, He closes and constricts their breast as if they were climbing up to the skies” (6:125); there are also these references: “Now the truth has come from your Lord: let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so” (18:29), and “Whoever follows the guidance does so for his own benefit, whoever strays away from it does so at his own peril” (39:41).⁹⁰² “While the Qur’ān could furnish both parties with arguments in equal measure, there was a mythological tradition favourable to the determinists.”⁹⁰³ Furthermore, Muslim tradition seems to have unanimously accepted predestination over free will;⁹⁰⁴ and after the outcome of the *mihna*,

⁸⁹⁷ Goldziher, *Introduction*, 81.

⁸⁹⁸ Cook, *Muslim Dogma*, 147.

⁸⁹⁹ Cook, *Muslim Dogma*, ch. 15.

⁹⁰⁰ See characteristically, Goldziher, *Introduction*, 78 ff.; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, 90-93.

⁹⁰¹ Goldziher, *Introduction*, 78.

⁹⁰² Following Haleem’s translation, Haleem, Abdel *The Qur’an: A New Translation*, Oxford & New York 2004.

⁹⁰³ Goldziher, *Introduction*, 82.

⁹⁰⁴ See Goldziher, *Introduction*, 82-83; and Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, 56-57.

and its consequent victory of over the mutazilites, only traces of the qadarite controversy were left in the works of their opponents. Even qadarite views are described through the mirror of the heresiographers' concepts of the later ninth and tenth century. Thus, whatever survives seems obscure, perplexed and accompanied by the well-known problems of authenticity and date fixing.

Sometimes the term *Qadariyya* is used interchangeably with the term *Ghaylaniyya*;⁹⁰⁵ and, as it has also been said "individuals named in the sources as Ghaylanis or Qadaris seem to be *mawali* rather than Arabs."⁹⁰⁶ In addition to this, it has been further suggested that behind the theological issues raised by the *Qadariyya*, there were political issues, connected to the legitimacy of the Umayyads;⁹⁰⁷ and due to them, both Hisham and al-Walīd II persecuted, exiled, and killed supporters of the movement. As a result, this group definitely played a significant role in the opposition to the caliph and in the subsequent attempts to overthrow him (al-Walīd).⁹⁰⁸

Following Goldziher's statement that Damascus was the centre of the controversy, and also taking into consideration the political involvement of the Qadarites, as well as the fact that the main participants of this controversy were active during John's life, it seems rather unlikely that John was not aware —at least— of the disputations taking place inside the Muslim community. Ma'bad al-Juhanī (d. 703) was executed after the insurrection of Ibn al-Ash'ath,⁹⁰⁹ Ghaylān al-Dimashqī (d. ca.743)⁹¹⁰ was crucified under Hishām's rule, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728) is actually considered the author of a Qadarite epistle,⁹¹¹ and Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 746), the alleged founder of the

⁹⁰⁵ See Hawting, *The First Dynasty*, 92.

⁹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰⁷ See Goldziher, *Introduction*, 83; Watt, *The Formative Period*, 99: "the elaboration of dogma in Islam was mainly due to internal political pressures;" see also Oberman, Julian "Political theology in early Islam: Hasan al-Basri's treatise on Qadar," *JAOS* 55 (1935), 138-162.

⁹⁰⁸ Wellhausen, *The Arab Kingdom*, 347, 355, 369, 377; Hawting, *The First Dynasty*, 92.

⁹⁰⁹ See van Ess' art. in *EF*²; Watt, *The Formative Period*, index s.n.

⁹¹⁰ Apart from Pellat's art. in *EF*², see the interesting discussion on Ghaylān's position in Islamic historiography and the relevant problems of his date of death in Judd, Steven C. "Ghaylan al-Dimashqi: the Isolation of a Heretic in Islamic Historiography," *IJMES* 31, (1999), 161-184; and van Ess, "Les Qadarites et la Ghaylāniya de Yazīd III," *SI* 31 (1970), 269-286.

⁹¹¹ See Ritter's art. in *EF*²; van Ess, *Theologie und Wissenschaft*, Vol. 2, 41-121; the edition of the epistle is found in Ritter, Hellmut "Studienzur Geschichte der islamischen Frömmigkeit. 1. Hasan al-Basri," *Der Islam* 21 (1933), 1-83; and Cook's objections to van Ess' dating of the epistle, Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, ch. 12.

Jahmiyya, (who —along with others— believed that the Qur’ān had been created),⁹¹² was executed due to his participation in the rebellious movement of Hārith b. Surayj, in Khurasan.⁹¹³ Ḥasan al-Baṣrī’s epistle (*Risāla fī ’l-qadar*), the “only surviving Qadarite document,”⁹¹⁴ in which the issue of free will is discussed, points to the existence of similar theological concerns on the Muslim side. Although its style and argumentation seem different from the *Dialexis*, the fact that the Muslims of that time were engaged in such issues is indicative of the probable interactions between Christians and Muslims.

The *Dialexis*’ argumentation consistently follows John’s theological thought not only about free will but also about the foreknowledge of God, as already discussed in the *Dialogue against the Manichees*. In the *Dialexis*, Christians are presented as proponents of free will, while Muslims (and as a result, Islam) are seen as defenders of predestination. Since the fact that John⁹¹⁵ was not aware of the Muslim disputations, during that period, seems rather unlikely, I think that he either refers to the general attitudes held by the majority of Muslims, or the Umayyad caliphs, or that he conceals this fact, in order to differentiate between the Christian faith and Islam (employing a literary device frequently used in the works of polemic). In any case, this part of the text does not seem to influence the formation of Muslim conceptions; it actually seems to be a step beyond the origins of the disputation of free will. Its worth regarding this issue might be that it hints at the Christian ideas offered in the Muslim-Christian dialogue at the beginning of the eighth century. In contrast, the second part of the *Dialexis* offers some ideas on how the defence of the doctrine of the Trinity might have caused the Muslim controversy about the createdness or uncreatedness of the Qur’ān.

What is interesting here, is that this work shows the participation of the Melkite community in interreligious dialogue, providing its own conceptions and ideas on the previously mentioned problems of predestination and free will. Furthermore, it tries to expose and explain their faith in the Trinity, by

⁹¹² See the discussion about their ideas in Watt, *Free Will*, 99-104; idem, *The Formative Period*, 144 ff.

⁹¹³ See Watt’s art. in *EL*²; and idem, *The Formative Period*, 134-135.

⁹¹⁴ Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, 117.

⁹¹⁵ I write this, having in mind also the composer of the *Dialexis*, whoever might be, who was definitely living in the same more or less period and in the same cultural environment of the Middle East.

the use of qur'ānic words and reference to the Qur'ān itself. This stance might hint at the introduction of Christian terminology or theological concepts into Muslim theology. We cannot speak about influences and we should underline the evolution of these subjects through the internal fights and needs of the Muslim community. However, the contribution of Christian thought seems inevitable, because Christian theology had already offered its answers to similar concerns and questions that the monotheistic tradition developed.

An event of great significance was the emergence and development of the *kalām* and the *mutakallimūn*.⁹¹⁶ While its origins is still a controversial issue among the scholars,⁹¹⁷ it is nonetheless clear that *kalām* was developed in the environment of Late Antiquity,⁹¹⁸ where Semitic, Iranian, Greek, Judaic and Christian ideas, bound by the legacy of Hellenistic culture, were shaping the historical canvas upon which Islam had to draw its own patterns. The theological debates of the formative period of Islam did not take place *in vacuum*; on the contrary, they were part of the emerging awareness of the developing Islam, responding to contemporary issues of piety, politics and authority,⁹¹⁹ and the position of Muslims in the conquered lands. In this process, the communications and interactions between Muslims and the conquered populations, as well as within the Muslim community itself, appear as a *sine qua non* prerequisite for the achievement of this endeavour.

A decisive factor for the evolution of the *kalām* was the meeting of the *mutakallimūn* (especially the Mutazila) with Greek philosophical thought and the subsequent use of Aristotelian reasoning by them, in the formation of their arguments. "The basic assumptions of the Greek philosophical system (as understood and transmitted through Christian scholars) formed the fundamental element underlying the whole position ... The Mutazila were the

⁹¹⁶ See Watt, W. M. *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, Oxford 2002 (repr.), 182.

⁹¹⁷ See the interesting discussion developed in van Ess, J. "The Beginnings of Islamic Theology" in Murdoch, J. E. & Sylla, E. D. (eds) *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning*, Dordrecht [1975], 87-104; Cook, M. "The Origins of 'Kalam'," *BSOAS* 43 (1980), 32-43; Calder, N. Review of M. Cook's *Early Muslim Dogma*, *JSS* 28 (1983), 187; and Judd, S. C. "Ghaylan al-Dimashqi: The Isolation of a Heretic in Islamic Historiography," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 (1999), 182-183, n. 67.

⁹¹⁸ An interesting presentation of the cultural status of the conquered populations, just before the conquests, can be found in Crone & Cook, *Hagarism*, ch. 7.

⁹¹⁹ The case of *mihna* is characteristic (if we interpret this way the events of that period), for which see Berkey, 126-128; M. Hinds' art. in *IEJ* VII, 2b; and Kennedy, Hugh *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, Longman 2004, 162-163.

first to introduce the Greek mode of reasoning and argumentation into Islamic religious discussions, changing the face of Muslim theology for all time as a result.”⁹²⁰

Modern scholars sometimes, in their efforts to trace influence or common sources, tend to connect a certain individual to another one or one book to another. It has to be emphasised though that, at least during the first period that marks the development of the *kalām*, Greek philosophical thought or Christian theology was mainly transmitted orally, through contact between people and the debates, which rose among them.⁹²¹ As a result, any study of the debates of that period should seriously consider the oral factor and should not be based exclusively on the analysis of the texts.

It is true that “a new religion has no theology; that develops later,”⁹²² as well as that Prophets are inspired preachers and not scholastic theologians; nonetheless, religions —as historical phenomena— develop in a certain cultural and historical milieu and during the interactions that take place in this certain milieu — through a process of assimilation or adaptation and/or negation and intellectual conflict.⁹²³

The debate of the divine attributes was a part of the discussions, which took place during the ‘formative period of Islamic thought’ and is strongly and intrinsically connected with the two other big issues of that period, i.e. anthropomorphism (*tashbih*) and the issue of createdness or uncreatedness of the Qur’ān.⁹²⁴ In spite of its transcendental character, the Qur’ān contains a lot of anthropomorphic expressions, of the same type that is found in the Bible. God has hands (Sur. 5, 69), eyes (Sur. 11, 39), or He is seated on his throne (Sur. 2, 27), He hates (Sur. 40, 10) and is wrathful (Sur. 4, 95), etc. Anthropomorphist tendencies were sharpened by the religious ideas prevalent

⁹²⁰ Rippin, A. *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, London & N. Y. 2002 (reprinted), 74.

⁹²¹ Cf. Wolfson, 148; and Hourani, G. H. “Islamic and Non-Islamic Origins of Mutazilite Ethical Rationalism,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 7 (1976), 75-76.

⁹²² Tritton, A.S. “Foreign Influence on Muslim Theology,” *BSOAS* 10 (1942), 837.

⁹²³ Cf. Nock, A. D. *Conversion*, London 1972 (reprinted).

⁹²⁴ See Wensinck, A. J. *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development*, Cambridge 1932, 68-69; and Watt, W. M. *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, Oxford 2002 (repr.), 242.

in the environment of Late Antiquity,⁹²⁵ and Muslims started to wonder how all these expressions should be understood.⁹²⁶ Furthermore, the whole issue was also connected with the debate of the divine attributes.

The issue of the created or uncreated Qur'ān was interwoven with the debate about divine attributes since the Qur'ān was perceived as the speech of God and therefore one of his attributes. While Watt agrees with Wensinck⁹²⁷ that the attitude towards the Qur'ān ensues as a logical consequence of the discussions on attributes, he thinks that historically it is more likely to have preceded them.⁹²⁸ Although I find it difficult to distinguish with any certainty which question arose first, it is clear that the stance towards attributes defined the attitude towards the question of the Qur'ān, and vice-versa. The main question, however, is what could have possibly generated the denial of divine attributes' reality and the production of such elaborate intellectual constructions.

Notwithstanding the fact that the attraction of Greek philosophy (Aristotle and the Neoplatonists) was a decisive factor for the development of *kalām*, it does not seem that it can offer us a coherent motivation for the emergence of this debate, at least in a very early stage. On the contrary, Shahrastani's testimony corroborates to the later influence of Greek philosophy: "the followers of Wasil went more deeply into this question after studying the works of the philosophers."⁹²⁹ Since the Judaic teachings of that period do not contain relevant ideas, Judaism should also be eliminated.⁹³⁰ Was it then the rejection of an uncreated Qur'ān or "could it have been fear of confusion with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity?"⁹³¹

⁹²⁵ *EP*² X, 341b.

⁹²⁶ Although different answers were given, it seems that the Mutazila, in general, interpreted them allegorically and metaphorically. See Goldziher, Ignaz *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* (trans. by Andras and Ruth Hamori), Princeton N. J. 1981, 93; Sweetman, J. W. *Islam and Christian Theology: A Study in the Interpretation of Theological Ideas in the Two Religions*, London 1945-1967, Part I, v. II, 27.

⁹²⁷ Wensinck, 77.

⁹²⁸ Watt, 242.

⁹²⁹ Shahrastani, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, 43.

⁹³⁰ Cf. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 112.

⁹³¹ Watt, 246.

The works of the Attributists suggest that there is a connection between divine attributes and Christian belief in the Trinity.⁹³² Al-Ashari says: “the Mutazila deny the attributes of the Lord of the Worlds, and think that the meaning of ‘hearing, seeing,’ is identical with the meaning of ‘knowing’, just as the Christians think that God’s hearing is His sight and His visibility and His Word and His Knowledge and His Son.”⁹³³ And Shahrastani: “Abu al-Hudhail’s theory that these attributes are aspects of the essence agrees with the Christian notion of the hypostases, or with the modes of Abu Hashim.”⁹³⁴ Before accepting the opponents’ opinions at face value, an analysis of the terminology used would be well advised; as would the tracing of a logical reason for the involvement of the Trinity dogma in the emergence of the debate being studied.

As previously mentioned, the debates of free will, the divine attributes, anthropomorphism and, the createdness or uncreatedness of the Qur’ān were part of the growing theological awareness of Muslims generated by the challenge that emergent Islam met in the Middle Eastern environment during Late Antiquity (especially Christianity and Greek philosophical thought). Through these discussions and dialogue, Muslim thought and Islam became adapted to the highly sectarian milieu of the Middle East and were able to construct their own distinct identity whilst at the same time defining their confessional boundaries towards the other monotheistic religions of the region. It seems that in these dialogues, the contribution of the Christian side was of great significance for the development of Muslim theological thought.

What is important though, is the style and the issues themselves that the *Dialexis* dealt regarding the development of the Muslim *kalām*. At more or less the same period the Mutazilite movement had introduced the use of rational disputation in theological matters. Moreover, the question of the predestination, as well as the man’s free will, were in the first line of their theological argumentation with the issue of the uncreatedness of the Qur’ān and the problem of anthropomorphism. All these issues are found in this disputation; moreover, there is a veiled reference to anthropomorphism: “the

⁹³²Term borrowed from Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, passim.

⁹³³Ashari, *Al-Ibanah an usul al-diyanah: The Elucidation of Islam’s Foundation*, 99.

⁹³⁴Shahrastani, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, 46.

prophet has spoken figuratively and not literally.”⁹³⁵ This concurrence of interests could not have been coincidental but it reveals either the common issues that both Christians and Muslims had to explore through their theological forces or, more probably, the influence that Christian theological thought exercised upon the nascent Mutazilite movement. This is apparent in the topics and the way they explored them: Jesus, the uncreated Word of God-Qur’ān, the uncreated word of God, Jesus as the word and spirit of God-divine attributes, and the anthropomorphism of the Scriptures and its (literally or metaphorical) interpretation. In any case, the appearance of the (Christian and Muslim) *kalām* is apparent in both instances, as Sidney Griffith has pointed out.

5. 6. Christians turn to Arabic: The linguistic change of the Melkite community

The process of Arabisation, initiated at the turn of the eighth century, did not only affect the administration of in the occupied territories but it gradually embraced all the aspects of everyday life. Business and trade, as well as communications inside the Caliphate, demanded the use of Arabic, in everyday life. The Melkites were the first Christian community to take the decisive step to use Arabic not just as their daily language but as their ecclesiastic language too, although their “patristic and liturgical tradition had been and would remain Greek;”⁹³⁶ the Melkites adopted Arabic in the eighth century, while the Jacobites followed suit at the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth century.⁹³⁷ The reasons for this linguistic change might not be so easy to assess, but some plausible suggestions can be made. The Melkites, in contradiction to the Jews, the Syrians (either Jacobites or East

⁹³⁵Le Coz, 246.

⁹³⁶Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 49; on the linguistic change of the Melkites, see Griffith, Sidney H. «From Aramaic to Arabic: The Language of the Monasteries of Palestine in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Periods,” *DOP* 51 (1997), 11-31.

⁹³⁷See Crone & Cook, *Hagarism*, 89, n. 71.

Syrians/Nestorians) and the Copts, did not build a strong ethno-religious identity based upon their language and/or their ethnicity; definitely (for most of them) their use of the Greek language, Hellenistic heritage and Chalcedonian faith were distinctive features of their communal expression, but it was actually their political and religious allegiance to the Byzantine Empire that mainly formed their identity (and lead to their being called Melkites by the other minorities around them). When Byzantium withdrew from the Middle Eastern territories, due to the Arab invasions, the Melkites found themselves alone; even if their allegiance with the Byzantine centre was profound and strong, it was gradually understood that they could not rely upon Byzantium for support. On the other hand, since the Arabisation of the Middle East was advancing quickly, and hopes for a Byzantine comeback were vanishing, their new rulers and the Arab population could have considered them untrustworthy, under a cloud of suspicion as possible collaborators with the enemy, that is to say the Byzantines. Hence, they might have opted for Arabic —the first among all the *dhimmī* minorities— regarding thus, their Greek linguistic heritage as only being appropriate for liturgical purposes. (This difference in identity construction might also shed light on the later acceptance of Arabic by the Syrians.)

From the eighth century to the ninth century, they adopted Arabic as the language of their communal identity and they produced a considerable amount of Christian theological literature in a distinctive Arabic idiom. This procedure was mainly carried out in the strongholds of Orthodox Chalcedonian faith, the monasteries of Jerusalem and the Sinai, and Mar Sabas and Mar Chariton, the famous monasteries in the Judean desert. This corpus included both translations and original works in Arabic; even the earliest Arabic translations of the Bible into Arabic also come from Palestine during this period. Undoubtedly, there should have been some earlier attempts to translate the Bible into Arabic, even in pre-Islamic times, for the use of Christian Arabs; unfortunately though, it seems that they have not survived or they have not been discovered yet, probably because most of the Arab Christian populations were subsumed into Islamic culture and religion at an

early stage.⁹³⁸ The research of Joshua Blau, who has closely examined what he called “ancient south Palestinian” Arabic manuscripts, showed that the majority of these texts are translations; out of almost sixty texts studied, only five according to him, are definitely original compositions, and all these are apologetic works.⁹³⁹ The rest of this corpus consists of translations of the Scriptures, saints’ lives, homilies, martyrdoms and patristic literature *florilegia*, namely the kind of books that were required for the internal religious life and conduct of Christians. The earliest Christian apologetic in Arabic is also found in this ‘archive’, and it is misleadingly named by its first editor *Fī tathlīth Allāh al-wāḥid* (*On the Triune Nature of God*) of Sinai Ar. 154.⁹⁴⁰

5. 7. *On the Triune Nature of God*: The earliest Arabic Christian apologetic text

Apart from being the earliest Christian apologetic in Arabic, the treatise *On the Triune Nature of God* presents certain peculiarities that demonstrate the development of Christian theological thought in close connection with its Muslim religious environment. The date of the text is given inside it: “If this religion was not truly from God, it would not have been established and stood for seven hundred years and forty six years.”⁹⁴¹ According to Swanson,⁹⁴² the Melkites used the Crucifixion as the beginning of the Christian era, thus the date of the text should be put in 788. Griffith on the other hand, suggested that

⁹³⁸ Cf. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 50.

⁹³⁹ Blau studied them thoroughly from a grammatical viewpoint, see Blau, Joshua *A Grammar of Christian Arabic Based Mainly on South-Palestinian Texts from the First Millennium*, CSCO, Vol. 267, 276, and 279, Louvain 1966-1967; the original compositions are discussed in Vol. 267, 42-54; see the praising Review of Wansbrough, John in *BSOAS* 31 (1968), 610-613. Griffith thinks that this number could actually be six, or seven, see Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 50, n. 20.

⁹⁴⁰ Gibson, Margaret Dunlop *An Arabic version of the Acts of the Apostles and the Seven Catholic Epistles, with a Treatise on the triune Nature of God*, *Studia Sinaitica* 7, London 1899, 74-107 (Arabic), 2-36 (English).

⁹⁴¹ *wa law lam yakun hādḥā l-dīn min Allāh, lam yathbut wa-lam yaqum [sic] mundhu sab ‘mi’at sana wa-sitt arba ‘in sana*, Ms. Sinai ar. 154, f. 110v (in Gibson’s edition is f. 113v; however, it is inexplicably omitted by her).

⁹⁴² Swanson, Mark N. “Some Considerations for the Dating of *Fī tathlīth Allāh al-wāḥid* (Sinai Ar. 154) and *Al-Jāmi ‘wujūh al-imān* (London british Library Or. 4950)” in *Actes du quatrième congress international d’études arabes chrétiennes*, ed. Samir, Khalil Samir, published in *Parole de l’Orient* 18 (1993), 117-141.

the beginning of the Melkite Christian era was, before the tenth century, starting perhaps from the Incarnation, and offers a date of around 755.⁹⁴³ Although Samir also suggested the Incarnation, as the start of the Christian era, he also accepted that the Melkite Incarnation era was used between the eleventh and the fourteenth century, and offered three dates for the text: 738, 768, and 771.⁹⁴⁴ Since, all scholars agree that the parchment is very old, and the issue still seems to be open according to the specialists in the field,⁹⁴⁵ I am inclined to consider the date of its composition as being between 771 and 788.⁹⁴⁶

In three units, this treatise discusses the doctrine of Trinity and the necessity of the Incarnation of the Word of God for the salvation of humanity; of course, this discussion is accompanied by a long catalogue of quotations from the prophets, in order to justify their fulfilment in the person of Jesus. The anonymous author begins this discussion thus, in an attempt to make the treatise's purpose clear: "We praise you, o God, and we adore you and we glorify you in your creative Word and your holy, life-giving Spirit, one God, and one Lord, and one Creator. We do not separate God from his Word and his Spirit. God showed his power and his light in the Law and the Prophets, and the Psalms and the Gospel, that God and his Word and his Spirit are one God and one Lord. We will show this, if God will, in these scriptures which have come down to anyone who wishes insight, understands things, recognizes the truth, and opens his breast to believe in God and his scriptures."⁹⁴⁷

One cannot fail to notice that the author talks about the Christian Scriptures, which the Muslims acknowledge and he uses the names that the Qur'ān uses for them, namely the Law, the Prophets, the Psalms and the

⁹⁴³ Griffith, Sidney H. "Theodore Abū Qurrah: the Intellectual Profile of an Arab Christian Writer of the First Abbasid Century" in *The Irene Halmos Chair of Arabic Literature, Annual Lecture*, Tel Aviv 1992, 43, n. 3; The puzzling issue is that he insists on his dating, even recently in idem, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 54, n. 32, while quoting Swanson's article (which obviously opposes his view).

⁹⁴⁴ Samir, Khalil Samir "The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity (c. 750)" in Samir, Khalil Samir & Nielsen, Jørgen S. (eds) *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750-1258)*, Leiden 1994, 61-64.

⁹⁴⁵ See the recent article Monferrer-Sala, Juan Pedro "Once Again on the Earliest Christian Arabic Apology: Remarks on a Palaeographic Singularity," *JNES* 69 (2010), 195-197.

⁹⁴⁶ Hoyland, opts for 788; see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 503, n. 174.

⁹⁴⁷ I have adapted the translation from the version of Gibson, *An Arabic Version*, 3 (English), 75 (Arabic).

Gospel. Furthermore, the author's assertion "that God and his Word and his Spirit are one God"⁹⁴⁸ resounds in the passage from the Qur'ān, *sūrat an-Nisā'* 4.171. As the text unfolds, the author does not hesitate to explicitly name the Qur'ān and to quote freely from it in eight instances.⁹⁴⁹ The really striking feature though, throughout the text, is that the author uses qur'ānic vocabulary and phraseology, as well as the thought-patterns of the Qur'ān; "in an important way the Islamic idiom of the Qur'ān has become his religion lexicon."⁹⁵⁰ The text reveals that its author, in his effort to express the Christian doctrine in Arabic, the only available literary idiolect he had in front of him was the language of the Muslim community;⁹⁵¹ thus, he conveys the Christian message to the Muslim community, by the use of a Muslim linguistic and theological frame. The author applies the qur'ānic expressions, to his apologetic narrative of Christian salvation, in an "unforced and natural way,"⁹⁵² indicating an evident acquaintance with the Qur'ān and the Muslim religion. "You are the compassionate, the merciful Lord of mercy; you sat upon the throne, You are higher than all creatures, and you fill all things. You choose what you will, but you are not subject to others' preferring; you establish your judgments, but no one can judge you; you have no need of us, but we are in need of you. You are near to those who approach you, you answered to the one who calls on you and prays to you. For you are, O God, the Lord of all things and the God of all things, and the Creator of all things." As it has been said, there is nothing particularly Christian about this prayer; it could also have been written by a Muslim. While it does not allude to anything specifically Christian, in fact there is an overabundance of Muslim vocabulary.⁹⁵³

⁹⁴⁸ *inna Allāh wa-kalimatuhi wa-rūḥuhi Allāh waḥidi.*

⁹⁴⁹ See also Harris, J. Rendel "A Tract on the Triune Nature of God," *American Journal of Theology* 5 (1901), 76; Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 105; and Samir, "The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity," 69-70, 108-109.

⁹⁵⁰ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 56. On its qur'ānic usage and style, see Samir, "The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity," 69f.; and Swanson, Mark N. "Beyond Proof-texting: Approaches to the Qur'ān in Some Early Arabic Christian Apologies," *The Muslim World* 88 (1998), 305f.

⁹⁵¹ See Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 105.

⁹⁵² See Swanson, Mark N. "Folly to the *Hunafā'*: the Crucifixion in Early Christian-Muslim Controversy" in Grypeou, Emmanouela, Swanson, Mark & Thomas, David (eds) *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, Leiden & Boston 2006, 245.

⁹⁵³ Cf. Samir, "The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity," 69.

Beyond this remarkable feature, the discussion of this apologetic treatise is unsophisticated and the argumentation rather simplistic.⁹⁵⁴ The text's heavy reliance on the Bible, and especially on the Old Testament for the interpretation of the Messiah's mission, is a rather typical traditional phenomenon of the Christian narrative of the salvation, which was foretold by the Prophets and fulfilled in the Gospels. A century ago, Harris drew attention to the text's affinity for the earlier anti-Judaic treatises; and he argued that its author considered the Muslims to be "new Jews", trying to convince them of the validity of the Christian faith, by the use of similar arguments to those the Christians used for the Jews.⁹⁵⁵ However, the tone of the text is obviously apologetic and not overtly polemic. The frequency of Biblical citations, and particularly those from the certain books acknowledged by the Muslim community (Nomos-Torah, the Psalms, the Evangiles), hint at the relevant Christian-Muslim dialogue of that period.⁹⁵⁶ The discussion about the right ways to read and interpret the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures was taken over by Muslim polemicists and was also found in the Qur'ān. It is true of course that the Christian polemic has been already trained, because of the Jewish accusations, to interpret the Old Testament in such a way as to corroborate the Christian message of the New Testament; in this case however, I think that the focus is on the topics mentioned above, and not on what Harris suggested. Swanson also comments on this issue, aptly remarking: "An unknown Melkite, perhaps a monk of Mt. Sinai, remembered Old Testament prophecies of the crucifixion that had been collected in ancient controversy with Jews, and redirected them to the attention of Muslims who honored Moses, the prophet to whom God spoke directly."⁹⁵⁷

Moreover, the treatise *On the Triune Nature of God* reveals the process of the inculturation that was taking place at that time, and the integration of the (non-Muslim) Christian Melkite minority into the cultural landscape that the Arabisation of the Umayyads had imposed on the conquered territories of the Middle East. It clearly shows the mechanisms of coexistence used by the Christian community inside the Muslim Caliphate, by adapting to its language

⁹⁵⁴ Cf. Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 105; and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 503.

⁹⁵⁵ Harris, "A Tract on the Triune Nature of God."

⁹⁵⁶ Cf. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 56.

⁹⁵⁷ Swanson, "Folly to the *Ḥunafā'*," 256.

and more crucially to the linguistic-theological style and frame of the new religion; also by finding theological ways of expressing the Christian truth, through the assimilation of the imagery and style of the Qur'ān. In this way its author attempts to address the Muslims, in a theologically comprehensible way for them. The Melkite Christians were regarded as *dhimmīs* by the Caliphate, and they changed their everyday and ecclesiastic language from Greek to Arabic, but with their active presence they reshaped the Arabisation imposed by their rulers; they chose to embrace Arab culture, while introducing into it their own religious identity: one Arabic culture and two religions. From the viewpoint of the history of theological developments and the course of Muslim-Christian dialogue, this anonymous treatise left its distinctive mark on Theodore Abū Qurrah's theological stance against Islam,⁹⁵⁸ but it has also been intelligently and justly considered as the link which connects "the formulation of Christological doctrine in the *Sīra* and the subtle philosophical argument of Theodore Abū Qurrah."⁹⁵⁹

5. 8. Summary

Soon after the conquests the Melkite Christians of the Middle East found themselves in a difficult position. Their erstwhile privileged status changed and they took their place among the other religious minorities in the Caliphate. Apart from the established religious enmity of the other Christian denominations, they had to face the suspicion of the Arab rulers due to their allegiance to the Byzantine religious and political orthodoxy. As a result, it seems that at certain times cautiousness was advised when controversial theological issues arose.

John of Damascus' work on Islam is the first attempt by the Christian Melkite side to offer a comprehensive view on Islam. Because of its importance, his work has been studied from several points of view, quite often raising controversial judgements about its ability to convey trustworthy information regarding Islam. Most scholars, when discussing John's work,

⁹⁵⁸ Swanson, "Beyond Proof-texting," 312-314.

⁹⁵⁹ Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 104.

tend to think of Islam as already formed, the way it came to be known, during that period. However, John's information and attitudes seem to fit pretty well into the narrative that Crone and Cook (along several other academics) have offered. John's references and descriptions point to an Islam still under formation. In addition to this, the polemical character of his work should not be underestimated. When John refers to Islam, he also has in mind the construction of his co-religionists and the defining of religious boundaries between the Islamic faith and Christian dogma.

In the meantime though, his work clearly reflects the topics and issues that were under discussion between Muslim and Christian communities. Furthermore, it points to the process by which interactions and confluence were taking place in the sectarian milieu of the Middle East. Be that as it may, any Byzantine —political or simply religious— inclinations on the part of the Christians living in *dār al-Islām* does not necessarily mean that they were also unaware of or indifferent, either to the Muslim beliefs and practices or to the developments taking place in this very environment.

Although his work remained practically unknown in the Byzantine centre, it was destined to exert great influence in both Byzantine theology and polemics. As it has been argued, a group of immigrant Melkites, who held strong Chalcedonian views, brought with them to the West and Constantinople their culture as well as their theological and liturgical tradition. This group has been considered responsible for the liturgical innovation of Constantinople's Church and the 'writing' of a history of Iconoclasm. In addition to this, they spread the knowledge of John's work. Since then, the Byzantine polemicists of the ninth century have adopted the basic lines and themes of John's polemic against Islam in order to articulate their arguments towards Islam and Muslims. The tone of their polemic though, differs significantly from that of John's. It appears that the harsh and strong polemic rejection of Islam went hand in hand with Byzantine assertiveness in the battlefields.

On the other hand, the Melkites of the Middle East adopted Arabic as their common language for everyday and ecclesiastical life. Apart from changing their language, it seems that they also chose a different approach towards Islam. While based solidly upon their orthodox faith, the Scriptures and the

writings of the Fathers (like John), they adapted the vocabulary and theological language of Islam in order to communicate and express themselves or their differentiation towards Muslims. By doing so, they were led into inculturation inside *dār al-Islām*, and managed to maintain their distinct religious identity, which has been coloured by Arabic culture ever since.⁹⁶⁰

Conclusions

This study attempted to offer a comprehensive presentation of the formation of Byzantine views on Muslims and Islam during the ‘dark century’, taking into consideration the historical and ideological conditions of that period and the impact that the rise of Islam had upon the formation of these views. Hopefully, this study might have filled the gap that the ‘paucity’ of sources present, concerning the formation of Byzantine views on Islam, as they appear in the ninth century. Its main target was to explore and present the process under which the Byzantine ideas and views about Islam and Muslims were formed during the period of the ‘dark century,’ while giving specific interest in contextualising both the Islamic challenge and the reactions of the Melkite Christians of the Middle East in the formation of these views.

The seventh century marks the end of the transitional period, which transformed the Late Antique world and culture into a Medieval one, both in material and ideological terms. The Roman Empire was gradually transforming into a Christian one, through a synthesis of its Graeco-Roman heritage and Christian belief. The Byzantine literature of this period was also affected by these changes. While classical historiographical tradition receded until the early ninth century, new genres appeared, corresponding to the new concerns and interests of the mostly Christian inhabitants of the empire. The notable tendency of these genres is the reconciliation of the human and the

⁹⁶⁰Writing the last phrase, I cannot escape commenting on the sorrowful fate of the Christians in the Middle East nowadays. Whatever the outcome of the present situation in the Middle East might be in the years to come, the uprooting of the Christian communities from their cradle is a definite fact, without any possibility of reverse.

divine. These, predominantly religious, texts constitute the main sources for the research undertaken.

At the beginning of the seventh century the Persian invasions of the eastern Byzantine provinces broadened the gap between the imperial centre and the populations of the Middle East; a gap that had already been created due to the Christological conflicts and divisions in the eastern Christian world from the mid-fifth century. Although Herakleios' victorious wars against the Persians managed to reconquer the Middle Eastern territories, the invading Arabs forced the Byzantine army to permanently withdraw from these areas during the 630s.

The already formed preconceptions of the world of Late Antiquity on Arabs actually affected the initial Byzantine understanding of the invading Arab forces. Arabs continued to be referred to as Hagarenes, Ishmaelites or Saracens. The Byzantines' conception of the Arabs, as barbarous and uncivilized nomads, seems to prevail during mid-seventh century while a growing awareness towards certain religious beliefs and practices of the Arab conquerors is also noted. Indicative of the crisis that the Byzantine centre still faces is the fact that all the available Greek Byzantine references about the Arabs/Muslims come from the Chalcedonian Christians of the Middle East. "Virtually nothing was written in Constantinople itself up to 780."⁹⁶¹

The impact of the Persian occupation of the Middle Eastern Byzantine provinces for almost thirty years, and the on-going religious conflicts and divisions between the Christians (for two centuries) in the same areas, seem to have prevailed over the conquered Christian populations' minds and concerns during the first decades of the conquests. Consequently, their attention was distracted from the Arab invasions, which were seen as a temporal chastisement by God due to their sins. Soon though, they came to realize that the invaders were there to stay. In addition to this, the Arab rulers started to openly express a distinct faith and policy.

The process of Arabisation and Islamisation from the last decades of the seventh century caused the emergence of apocalyptic and eschatological interpretations on the part of the Christians so that the victorious advance and

⁹⁶¹ Cameron, "Texts as Weapons," 199.

persistence of the enemy can be explained. Interestingly, apocalypticism was also flourishing on the Muslim side in anticipation of their eschatological expectations.

The escalation of the apocalypticism at the beginning of the eighth century was followed by a decisive confrontation between Byzantines and Muslims in front of the walls of Constantinople in 717-718. In the aftermath of this siege, it seems that Arab strategy changed its orientation towards the East. However, the impact that the Islamic challenge had upon Byzantine thought is reflected in Leo's actions and policies.

For the first time the imperial centre came face to face with the religious faith of the Muslims and had to recognise it. Furthermore, Leo's *Ecloga*, although following certain established patterns of Christian tradition, reveals several religious features, which attempt to respond to the monotheistic Abrahamic claims of the Muslims. The results of the response to the Islamic challenge started to appear. This awareness towards the monotheistic claims of the Muslim side is evident in the alleged Correspondence between Leo and 'Umar. Through the literary figures of these two emperors, the opposition between the Byzantine Empire and the Muslim Caliphate is presented in clearly religious terms. The rise of Iconoclasm was also discussed in the context of the relevant 'Iconoclastic' phenomena in the Middle East, taking into consideration both the Islamic challenge as well as the Melkite reactions towards this issue, while its connection with a series of internal Byzantine issues and evolutions, as well as the problematic character of the sources was acknowledged.

The first half of the eighth century is also of great significance with regards to the fate of the Melkite Christians of the Middle East. Their status under the Caliphate changed and become restricted, while their allegiance to the Byzantine Church still remained strong. John of Damascus produced the first —more or less— complete and deliberate reference to Islam, which seems to be well informed and in compliance with an Islam still in the process of its formation, as claimed by certain academics in recent decades. In addition to this, certain other works might throw light on the interactions taking place between the Christian and Muslim communities through polemic

attitudes, which contributed to the final formation of Islam as it came to be known.

From the mid-eighth century the Melkites became the first Christian community to adopt the Arabic language for their everyday life, as well as for their ecclesiastic expression. In doing so they opted for inculturation to Arab society, and also found ways of religious communication with the Muslims. On the other hand, the Melkite immigrants were held responsible for the transfer of knowledge and information about their tradition to Constantinople. This resulted in several changes in Byzantine life, but the spread of John's work against Islam formed the basis of and defined the themes and issues of the later Byzantine polemic.

The ninth century witnessed the parting ways for Byzantine and Melkite Christians with regards to their attitudes towards Islam. Whereas the Melkites chose symbiosis and inculturation to the Muslim-Arab society, their coreligionist Byzantines, based upon the former's transmitted knowledge, chose the harsh polemic attitudes against Islam and Muslims.

Appendix

Anti-Judaic Treatises in the seventh century

“One of the main characteristic features of the religious literature of late antiquity is its highly polemical nature. Polemics helped the traditions to define themselves, but also betrayed the underlying uncertainties and competition which fuelled them in the first place.”

(Jonathan Berkey)⁹⁶²

A striking feature of the late sixth to early eighth century, but most particularly of the seventh century, is the re-emergence and proliferation of anti-Judaic tracts in the Byzantine Empire, a well-known genre since the

⁹⁶² Berkey, *The Formation of Islam*, 19.

second century AD. This fact has rightfully been acknowledged and commented on by several scholars, due to the issues it poses for the religious and social developments taking place at that time.⁹⁶³ Apart from the changes in Byzantine society and culture that these works indicate, they also raise questions about their connection with the rise of Islam; it has actually been suggested that the very existence and contents of these works during that specific period imply a covert polemic against the nascent and triumphantly expanding Islam. Although, as Nicholas de Lange emphatically stressed,⁹⁶⁴ the study of Byzantine Jewish history has been neglected —due to a lack of interest in or negative attitudes towards Byzantine history in general— in the last twenty years academics' awareness of this topic made itself apparent through the publication of several articles⁹⁶⁵ as well as books,⁹⁶⁶ and most interestingly critical editions of certain anti-Judaic texts.⁹⁶⁷ A great part of the

⁹⁶³ See among others Haldon, *Byzantium*, 346-348; Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 220-222, where he refers to anti-Judaic tracts as expression “of the religious implications of Byzantine military defeats” (220). For Cameron's works on the topic, see below, n. 876.

⁹⁶⁴ de Lange, N. R. M. “Jews and Christians in the Byzantine Empire: Problems and Prospects” in Wood, D. (ed.) *Christianity and Judaism, Studies in Church History* 29 (Oxford 1992), 15-32.

⁹⁶⁵ I refer here to the most important articles appeared in the last decades: Waegeman, Maryse “Les traités *Adversos Judaeos*: Aspects de relations Judéo-Chrétiennes dans le monde Grec,” *Byzantion* 56 (1986), 295-313; Cohen, Mark R. “Islam and the Jews: Myth, Counter-Myth, History,” *The Jerusalem Quarterly* 38 (1986), 125-137; Leder, Stefan “The Attitude of the Population, especially the Jews, towards the Arab-Islamic Conquests of Bilād al-Shām and the Question of their Role therein,” *Die Welt des Orients* 18 (1987), 64-71; Laga, Carl “Judaism and Jews in Maximus Confessor's Works Theoretical Controversy and Practical Attitude,” *BS* 51 (1990), 177-188; Dagron, Gilbert “Judaïser,” *TM* 11 (1991), 359-380; de Lange, N. R. M. “Jews and Christians in the Byzantine Empire: Problems and Prospects” in Wood, D. (ed.) *Christianity and Judaism, Studies in Church History* 29 (Oxford 1992), 15-32; Cameron, Averil “The Jews in Seventh-Century Palestine,” *Scripta Classica Israelica* 13 (1994), 75-93; Cameron, Averil “Byzantine and Jews: Some Recent Work on Early Byzantium,” *BMGS* 20 (1996), 249-274; Horowitz, Elliott “‘The Vengeance of the Jews was Stronger than their Avarice’: Modern Historians and the Persian Conquest of Jerusalem in 614,” *Jewish Social Studies* 4 (1998), 1-39; Déroche, Vincent “Polémique anti-Judaïque et émergence de l'Islam (7^e-8^e siècles),” *REB* 57 (1999), 141-161; Cameron, Averil “Blaming the Jews: the Seventh-Century Invasions of Palestine in Context,” *Mélanges Gilbert Dagron, TM* 14 (2002), 57-78. For bibliography see Cameron's last article.

⁹⁶⁶ Since Williams, A. Lukyn *Adversos Judaeos: A Bird's Eye View of Christian Apologiae until the Renaissance*, Cambridge 1935, the research in the field is enriched by works as Schrekenberg, H. *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos Texte und ihr literarische Umfeld I-II*, Frankfurt a. M./Bern 1982; Corrigan, Kathleen Anne *Visual Polemics in the Ninth Century Byzantine Psalters*, Cambridge 1992; Wilken, Robert L. *The Land called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought*, New Haven CT 1992 (esp. chapters 10 & 11); Olster, David Michael *Roman Defeat, Christian Response, and the Literary Construction of the Jew*, Philadelphia 1994.

⁹⁶⁷ Apart from the edition of *Doctrina Jacobi*, Déroche presented a critical edition of all the fragments of Leontius' of Neapolis “L'Apologie contre les Juifs de Léontios de Néapolis,” *TM* 12 (1994), 45-104; also idem, “La polémique anti-Judaïque au VI^e et au VII^e siècle: un

discussion has focused on several crucial aspects of these texts, especially the real or fictional character of the debates between Christians and Jews, the evolution of the stereotypical image of Jew in Byzantine society and literature⁹⁶⁸ and the suggestion of D. Olster, that the anti-Judaic texts constitute covert anti-Muslim attacks, because Jews in these works function as a rhetorical device and “as a substitute for the Arabs.” The main questions that emerge from the flourishing of this genre during this period, and which have attracted the interest of recent research are as follows: What was the reason for the proliferation of this genre during that period? Are the anti-Judaic texts covert anti-Muslim attacks? and finally, Does this kind of literature offer any valuable information concerning Byzantine perceptions and attitudes towards Islam and Muslims?⁹⁶⁹

Cameron’s claim then that “one of the first and most difficult tasks will be to disentangle fact from fiction in the available evidence” should come as no surprise.⁹⁷⁰ This task, however is continuously hampered by the features and character of these works, as well as by the “selectivity and distortion ...deployed in contemporary and modern accounts alike,” as she has readily admitted.⁹⁷¹ Among the features that all these texts share are issues concerning authorship and date: the works in question are either anonymous (with the remarkable exception of Leontius’ *Apology*) or pseudonymously ascribed to ecclesiastical (either well-known or completely unknown) figures of the Christian Church.⁹⁷² Furthermore, the way of composition and circulation of the majority of anti-Judaic texts intensifies the above-mentioned difficulties and obscures the real circumstances of their writing. Several of these works, crucial for their probable relationship to Islam, are reworkings of previous texts, with certain additions and redactions done in the course of

mémento inédit, les *Képhalaia*” in Dagron, Gilbert & Déroche, Vincent “Juifs et Chrétiens dans l’orient du VII^e siècle,” *TM* 11 (1991), 275-311. The most recent critical edition of one of the most problematic and quite often mentioned texts (*Dialogus Papisci et Philoni*) is *Dialogo di Papisco e Filone giudei con un monaco*, testo, traduzione e commento Aulisa Immacolata e Schiano Claudio, Bari 2005.

⁹⁶⁸ See in particular Dagron, Gilbert “Judaïser,” *TM* 11 (1991), 359-380.

⁹⁶⁹ For a brief list of these texts see Déroche, “La polémique anti-Judaïque au VI^e et au VII^e siècle.”

⁹⁷⁰ Cameron, Averil “The Jews in Seventh-Century Palestine,” *Scripta Classica Israelica* 13 (1994), 77.

⁹⁷¹ Cameron, Averil “Blaming the Jews: the Seventh-Century Invasions of Palestine in Context,” *Mélanges Gilbert Dagron*, *TM* 14 (2002), 78.

⁹⁷² E.g. Anastasius of Sinai and Stephen of Bostra.

time, making their exact dating extremely difficult if not impossible. For the scope of this study though, suffice to say that the most relevant texts (*Doctrina Jacobi*, *Quaestiones ad Antiochem Dux*, Anastasius' *Adversus Judaeos Disputatio*, *Dialogus Papisci et Philonis*, and *Trophies of Damascus*) were written from the mid 630s to 690 AD. In addition, the vast majority of scholars concede that these texts are almost exclusively directed towards Christians, and therefore it is quite obvious that they offer a one-sided version of the situation. As a result, the dilemma posed in accepting these texts at face value or considering their depiction of Jews as a literary construction ("une hallucination collective des chretiens", according to Déroche) cannot be resolved by a simple either/or type of answer.⁹⁷³

First of all, it has to be stressed that the anti-Judaic texts are not isolated phenomena but they are part and parcel of the polemical literature developed in the mid-seventh century, in the form of polemical letters, doctrinal declarations and real or literary debates, disputations and texts; Maximus' real debates with Pyrrhus in Carthage, as well as the dialogical works of Anastasius of Sinai against Monotheletism, are among the most eloquent examples of this atmosphere.⁹⁷⁴ Furthermore, they testify to the increasing use of texts not only as carriers of authority but as weapons against the 'otherness' that heretical groups or ideas expressed towards the Orthodoxy proclaimed and defended by Byzantine policy (either imperial or ecclesiastic).⁹⁷⁵ Quite obviously, when Iconoclasm came, it simply intensified already existing tendencies and attitudes. It should be emphatically stressed here, that it is against this highly disputational and polemical background that the Byzantines started to form their knowledge and understanding of Muslims and Islam; and consequently to shape their views and attitudes towards them.

⁹⁷³ Cf. Cameron, "Blaming the Jews," 78.

⁹⁷⁴ See Cameron, Averil "Disputations, Polemical Literature and the Formation of Opinion in the early Byzantine Period" in Reinink, G. J. & Vastiphout, H. L. J. (eds.) *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Mediaeval Near East*, Leuven 1991, 91-108; and Haldon, John "The Works of Anastasius of Sinai: a Key Source for the History of Seventh-Century East Mediterranean Society and Belief" in Cameron, Av. & Conrad, L. (eds) *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East I: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, Princeton 1992, 107-147.

⁹⁷⁵ See Cameron, Averil "Texts as Weapons: Polemic in the Byzantine Dark Ages" in Bowman, Alan & Wolf, Greg (eds.) *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, Cambridge 1994, 198-215.

The increasing awareness of and hostility towards Jews seems to commence with the changes in Justinianic legislation that reduced their status to that of second-class citizens in the empire. This legislation was part of Justinian's strong pro-Christian policy, which was addressed to all dissidents and heretics, and "should also be seen in relation to the generally repressive attitude of the state in this period towards all minority groups."⁹⁷⁶ In this context, the growing anti-Judaic attitudes allowed for the labelling of Jews as disturbing elements in the empire and their connection to civil upheavals during the reign of Phokas, as is evident in *Doctrina Jacobi*. The crucial point though for the heightening and outburst of anti-Judaic attitudes is the Persian invasions, and especially the capture of Jerusalem in 614. The accounts of Strategius⁹⁷⁷ and the anacreontic lamentations of Sophronius for the sack of Jerusalem,⁹⁷⁸ as well as the reports from the eastern sources⁹⁷⁹ and Theophanes' chronicle,⁹⁸⁰ emphasise the role of Jews as collaborators with the Persian invaders against the Christian population of the Near East. From then on, and until the period of Iconoclasm, the presentation of the Jew takes on highly polemical overtones and stereotypical characteristics of the 'inimical other'; the Jews are accused of and held responsible for not only collaboration with enemies but as instigators of the Iconoclastic conflict.⁹⁸¹ Judaism was used to signify heretical tendencies or deviations from orthodoxy,⁹⁸² as is clearly depicted in Canons 11, 33 and 99 of the Quinisext Council (692), that warn against Jewish practices such as the use of unleavened bread or a variety of several liturgical practices heavily influenced by Judaism, and forbade mixing with Jews in baths or consulting Jewish doctors.⁹⁸³ It is in this context that Herakleios issued, for the first time in Roman legislation, the imperial

⁹⁷⁶ Cameron, *The Mediterranean World*, 143.

⁹⁷⁷ *La prise de Jerusalem par les Perses en 614*, ed. and trans. Garitte, G., Louvain 1960; *Expugnationis Hierosolymae AD 614 recensiones Arabicae*, ed. and trans. Garitte, G., Louvain 1973, 1974.

⁹⁷⁸ Gigante, M. (ed.) Sophronii, *Anacreontica, Opuscula*, Rome 1957 (poems 19 and 20).

⁹⁷⁹ *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, trans. by Thomson, R. W., Liverpool 1999.

⁹⁸⁰ See the translation and commentary by Mango, C. & Scott, R. *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, Oxford 1997.

⁹⁸¹ See also the relevant to Iconoclasm anti-Judaic texts discussed by Thümmel, Hans-Georg *Die Frühgeschichte der ostkirchlichen Bilderlehre. Texte und Untersuchungen zur Zeit vor dem Bilderstreite* (Texte und Untersuchungen 139), Berlin 1992, (texts 354-367).

⁹⁸² See Haldon, *Byzantium*, 347. For a well-attested description and analysis of this evolution see Dagron, "Judaizer."

⁹⁸³ Mansi, XI, 933E, 945E, 975D, 985E.

edict for the forced baptism of Jews,⁹⁸⁴ a practice later followed by Leo III and Basil I.

The anti-Judaic texts are composed in dialogic form as (sometimes public) debates between Christians and Jews. The interlocutors address questions to each other about true faith, biblical references, and their understanding and interpretation of issues such as ethics and moral conduct, the person of the true Messiah, and the validity and interpretation of prophecies; most of them make extensive use of florilegia and manuals against Jewish arguments. Two major themes pervade throughout these dialogues, namely the question of the political superiority of the Byzantine Empire against the invading enemies, the veneration of icons, the cross and holy objects (with the *Doctrina* being the only exception to the rule as it discusses only the *proskynesis* of the cross), while the issue of circumcision and direction of prayer is found only in the *Trophies*.⁹⁸⁵ The references made to Muslims are either vague allusions to their recent conquests, or, in the case of the *Trophies*, attestations of their presence as spectators in these dialogues. An interesting piece of information is found in *Dialogus Papisci et Philoni* and Anastasius' *Quaestiones ad Antiochem Dux*, and it has to do with the efforts of the Arabs to change Byzantine coins: "Not only the emperor [himself], but they were also unable to eliminate his picture with the cross from the gold currency (*nomisma*), even though some tyrants attempted it,"⁹⁸⁶ "How was no one able to abolish or take from us the seal of gold? How many kings of the gentiles, Persians and Arabs attempted this and were in way able? Thus God wished to show that, even if the Christians are persecuted, we reign over all."⁹⁸⁷

As has been noticed, the anti-Judaic texts were based upon already well-known tendencies and long-established attitudes. The proliferation of this genre though was strongly influenced by other factors. John Haldon explains it as a defensive reaction of a society in retreat: the changes brought in during the seventh century led Byzantine society to form exclusivist and introvert attitudes, the rejection of religious pluralism and the need to austere define

⁹⁸⁴ See previous chapter.

⁹⁸⁵ Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 79-82.

⁹⁸⁶ Anastasius, *PG* 89, 1224A.

⁹⁸⁷ *Dialogus Papisci et Philoni*, 10, 6-10. Kaegi discusses the significance of this numismatic issue, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 223-227.

and delineate the limits of political and religious orthodoxy.⁹⁸⁸ David Olster proposed a similar interpretation of all this activity in the context of imperial defeat: after the exemplary defeat, hopes of imperial restoration could only be realised upon victory over the most persistent enemy (i.e. Jews). During this period, we not only witness the transformation of the late Roman Empire into a more Byzantine one, following attitudes of exclusiveness and uniformity in both religious and political fields (as Haldon emphatically stresses) but we also see an instability in the political order and a conflict between the emperor and the Church for authority, both of which can serve as motives for the polemics developed in that period.⁹⁸⁹ On the other hand, Dagron offered an analysis of the psychological and intellectual background of Christian Byzantine society, showing how the earlier anti-Judaic sentiments and prejudices were transformed into the later demonising of the Jews and the use of term as a synonym for every heretical view. In addition, Cameron proffers a view, based on the cognitive function of these polemic developments: “Sharper definition of opposites, together with a clearly defined linear (and orthodox) view of history enabled contemporaries to make sense of their own world and especially of its fluidity. They were in other words busy creating for themselves an imagined world of certainty and strong boundaries.”⁹⁹⁰ Notwithstanding the validity of both functionalist explanations (as Cameron calls the former two)⁹⁹¹ or psychological ones, the deep roots of such an explosion of literary activity should not only be sought in the field of prejudices but in the field of real events and their resonance in the minds and hearts of contemporary society. The Persian invasions, and especially the sack of Jerusalem, probably had a more profound impact, both in real and ideological terms, than is often assumed. These invasions certainly “stoked the flames of messianism among the Jews of Palestine and Syria,”⁹⁹² a messianism, which, apart from religious dimensions encompassed political ones as well.⁹⁹³ The Christian accusations of Jewish collaboration with the

⁹⁸⁸ Haldon, *Byzantium*, esp. 346-348.

⁹⁸⁹ Cf. Aulisa Immacolata e Schiano Claudio, *Dialogo di Papisco e Filone giudei con un monaco*, testo, traduzione e commento, 36.

⁹⁹⁰ Cameron, “Texts as Weapons,” 213.

⁹⁹¹ Cameron, “Blaming the Jews,” 75.

⁹⁹² Berkey, *The Formation of Islam*, 52.

⁹⁹³ *Loc. cit.*

invading Persians are usually met with extreme scepticism and rejection, even when archaeology corroborates their testimony.⁹⁹⁴ Stephan Leder though, has suggested that Christian charges against Jewish attitudes towards the invaders should not pass unnoticed.⁹⁹⁵

The references of the above mentioned sources (Strategius, Sophronius, Maximus, and most of the eastern sources) concerning the role of Jews in the Persian invasions, even if they are biased and express polemical attitudes, are at least strong indications about the perceptions and feelings of several Christians at that time towards Jews. Several scholars have pointed out the rise of eschatological expectations and messianic hopes for the Jewish population when the Persians, and later the Arabs, rose to power, connecting them with the appearance of certain apocalyptic texts;⁹⁹⁶ and quite reasonably, the Jews could hope, if not to restore their status, at least to change their inferior position as second-class citizens should Byzantine rule end. Definitely it is not wise to turn from over-scepticism to total acceptance of polemical works at face value; cautiousness is always advised. In this case it seems almost certain that for most Christian sources of the seventh century there was a connection between Jews and Arabs, though this attitude might reflect bitter sentiments from the period of the Persian invasion to Jerusalem or long-established prejudices and recourse to familiar schemes of interpretation. As a result, such a conception cannot be dismissed out of hand, and its outright rejection seems rather uncritical and dogmatic. “The statement that Jews ‘had mixed with the Saracens,’ as claimed [in *Doctrina Jacobi*] ... is therefore, even if meant as a polemical charge, not to be regarded as having no foundation in reality” and “if there had been a Jewish calculation concerning the possible advantages brought over by an Arab victory over the Byzantine Empire, it would not have been false”.⁹⁹⁷

In addition to these reasons, Cameron, and other Byzantinists alike, have also rightfully turned our attention to internal Byzantine theological

⁹⁹⁴ See the detailed discussion in Horowitz, “The Vengeance of the Jews,” regarding the Jewish participation in Persian invasion (as well as the slaughter of Christian prisoners at the Mamilla Pool) and how it was met by Jewish historians.

⁹⁹⁵ Leder, “The Attitude of the Population,” 69, 70, 71.

⁹⁹⁶ Conveniently found in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 307-321, where also further bibliography is given.

⁹⁹⁷ Leder, “The Attitude of the Population,” 69, 71.

developments connected to the increase in anti-Judaic texts, mainly the evolution of the cult of the Cross (partially due to the events during the Persian invasions as well as Herakleios' victorious wars and the triumphal restoration of the Cross in Jerusalem by Herakleios), and of course the emerging Iconoclastic conflict. She considers the anti-Judaic tracts as the tip of the iceberg; she argues that the main issue is the culmination of anti-Judaic attitudes on the part of Byzantine society, and she points to the "heightened religious tensions and rivalries ... in the eastern provinces."⁹⁹⁸ It is not then isolated factors, either political or religious (no matter how important and crucial they were) but this broad spectrum of reasons, that I think puts us on more solid ground and explains the appearance and proliferation of anti-Judaic texts.

The academic consensus on the issue of the real or fictitious character of the dialogues, presented in the anti-Judaic treatises, seems to lean towards the latter option, whether it is expressed in absolute terms ("the dialogues are fictive, their theology derivative")⁹⁹⁹ or with certain reservations as in the articles of Déroche and Cameron. Déroche points out that "en somme, cette littérature polémique présente des débats fictifs qu'elle imagine en bonne partie à l'aide des textes antérieurs, mais elle reflète bien une réalité contemporaine."¹⁰⁰⁰

This issue goes back to the opposing views of Williams and Harnack: whereas the former suggests that the anti-Judaic works were a product of real debates, the latter considers them to be fictive products. Some of them are well-informed about Judaic beliefs and interpretations (like *Kephalaia*, as Déroche remarks), and some others are perfectly put into an historical and social context (like *Doctrina*), while they use certain words that carry Judaic connotations, like the word *mamzer* —*mamzeros*— (found in *Doctrina*, Gregentius' *Disputation*, and Leontius' *Vita Symeonis*) or the word *eleimmenos* for the Messiah (instead of *Christos*, found in *Doctrina*, *Kephalaia*, *Dialogus Papisci* as well as *Trophies*). The last word was introduced by Aquila in his translation of the Bible (which was used by the

⁹⁹⁸ Cameron, "The Jews in Seventh-Century Palestine," 87.

⁹⁹⁹ Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 117.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Déroche, "La polémique anti-Judaïque," 289.

Jews) due to the Jewish objection to the term Christ, a fact which Irenaeus was extremely critical of. In spite of these and similar features, what is found inside most of these dialogues (with the notable exception of *Doctrina*) is what Nicholas de Lange has called “an official theology of Judaism,”¹⁰⁰¹ and the aim of conversion (clearly expressed e.g. in *Dialogus Papisci*). They are based upon a pre-existing (before the seventh century) polemic against Judaism, following already known literary patterns and copying florilegia against Judaic beliefs. It is evident that they are produced for internal use: their target is to strengthen and reaffirm the Christian faith and to prove its superiority, preventing possible conversions; this leads to the creation and presentation of a distorted image of the Jew as a fictitious and stereotypical cardboard figure.

While accepting in general the validity of the views just presented above, I also find it necessary to point to Déroche’s statement that these works also reflect the everyday reality and the real atmosphere of debates, discussions and disputations of that period, well-attested to in other sources and in other cases (e.g. the Monothelete conflict). Meanwhile, the very fact that these texts continuously oppose and respond to Jewish objections against Christianity (even stereotypically known and expressed) should not lead us to disregard the possibility of real inter-communal disputations, dialogues and contacts.

As has already been said, Olster (inspired as he says by his professor Walter Kaegi, who viewed the same texts as expressions of Byzantine agony in front of the Muslim invasions) suggested in his work that anti-Judaic texts are covert anti-Muslim attacks. He claimed that “the Jews were the nominal target of Christian polemic, but they did far better service as a rhetorical device for Christian apologetic: not only as a well-defined enemy in whom the Christians’ self-doubt could be personified and exorcised, but as a substitute for the Arabs,”¹⁰⁰² and that “... *Trophies*, *Papiscus*, and *Gregentius*, in different ways, illustrate how Christians confronted victorious Islam through victory over the Jews, and thereby legitimated Christianity and promised restoration.”¹⁰⁰³ His opinions on the subject were met with strong and well-

¹⁰⁰¹ De Lange, “Jews and Christians in the Byzantine Empire,” 26-27.

¹⁰⁰² Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 182.

¹⁰⁰³ Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 182.

founded criticism both by Cameron and Déroche, and there is no need here for repetition of their arguments. Some main points have to be highlighted though.

Firstly, Olster does not allow for the late and gradual development of Islam or its gradual understanding and knowledge from the Christians. He seems to believe that Islam appeared already shaped and made itself expressively apparent to the conquered populations of the Near East. Here, it has to be remembered that the first open declaration of Islamic faith from the Muslim side (the inscription on the Dome of the Rock) comes after the later anti-Judaic text of the period that refers to Muslims (i.e. *Trophies*).

Secondly, as Déroche remarks on the citation from Gregentius' *Disputation* by Olster: "Does not the Lord, therefore, through all the days of this age, protect, watch over and guard those who love him, not only from the fire of evil, that evil connivance of the devil that consumes the souls of men, but also from the invasion, that is, from the demonic south, the remaining tyranny of Satan,"¹⁰⁰⁴ the reference to "the demonic south" has nothing to do with the invasion from the south "the remaining tyranny of Satan," but to a well-known mention of the spiritual battle in the believer's soul, thus signifying not a geographical term as Olster claims, but an hour of the day.¹⁰⁰⁵ In addition to this, it should be said that the Greek text reads as: "*Ho Kyrios men oun en pasais tais emerais tou aionos toutou, autos skiazei kai frourei kai fylattei pantas tous aghapontas auton; ou monon apo kausionos tou ponerou tou kaiontos tas psychas ton anthropon, eis to erghazesthai ten anomian tou diabolou, alla apo symptomatos kai daimoniou mesembrinou, kai tes loipes tyrannidos tou Satana.*" What is surprising here is the fact that it escapes the attention of both scholars that the language used in the text is derived from the text of Psalms (*Septuagint*) with the crucial words coming from psalm 90.6: "*apo symptomatos kai daimoniou mesembrinou.*" The word translated here obviously derives from the parallel Latin translation of the text (*incursu*) and not the Greek original, changing and perplexing the whole meaning of the quotation. This kind of exaggerated interpretation is also followed by Olster in his mention of Maximus' supposedly alluding reference to the Muslim

¹⁰⁰⁴ Olster's translation of Gregentius' text (*PG* 86, 688CD), *Roman Defeat*, 141.

¹⁰⁰⁵ See Déroche, "Polémique anti-Judaïque et émergence de l'Islam," 150.

invasions,¹⁰⁰⁶ something that has already been rejected by Hoyland.¹⁰⁰⁷ A third point (also discussed by Hoyland) has to do with his claim that the issue of the direction of prayer is referred to for the first time in the *Trophies*. However this is incorrect, as this issue had already been mentioned by Tertulian. This way of interpretation and use of the texts clearly show that Olster, in his desire to stress the political context, neglected the religious context, thus offering a distorted narrative of both the period under study and the anti-Judaic texts. “Le défaut de l’interprétation de D. Olster est d’accorder trop d’importance à un seul facteur, le contexte politique, et donc de minorer abusivement le facteur religieux.”¹⁰⁰⁸

Cameron is unquestionably right about one thing: “the Byzantines did not mince their words when writing about any group of which they did not approve, whether heretics, schismatics or pagans.”¹⁰⁰⁹ On the other hand, as it has been underlined, it took a certain period of time until Islam made itself clear; definitely however, this kind of exercise greatly facilitated the birth of anti-Islamic tracts, something that is obvious in both style and wording. Not surprisingly then, Islam figures in the list of heresies in the first Christian anti-Judaic debates.

As far as the hypothesis that the anti-Judaic treatises are covert anti-Muslim attacks, the works of Anastasius of Sinai are suggestive of the opposite, although he attacks Jews and Jewish beliefs (one anti-Judaic tract is attributed to him), he clearly mentions the Muslims and their beliefs (those he was aware of). This points instead to the indirect corroboration of the gradual development of Muslim beliefs, and the rather meagre information that derives from the *Trophies* about common Judaic and Muslim practices (circumcision, direction of prayer and veneration of objects).

Although there are strong indications of the bitterness felt by the Christian population of the Near East, due to invasions, nothing of validity can be said about the transfer of knowledge with regards to Muslim beliefs or

¹⁰⁰⁶ Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 88.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 77, n.75.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Déroche, “Polemique anti-Judaïque et émergence de l’Islam,” 147.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Cameron, Averil “Byzantines and Jews: Some Recent Work on Early Byzantium,” *BMGS* 20 (1996), 274.

practices. Muslims are still in the background (watching the Christian-Jewish debate as spectators to it, if we are to accept the historicity of *Trophies*' mention). The Muslim invasions seem rather to be the catalyst for these apologetic texts but not the target of anti-Judaic texts.¹⁰¹⁰ From another point of view though, as a response to this unfortunate situation, the anti-Judaic texts copiously try to reaffirm the Christian faith, to encourage the disheartened people and overcompensate for the cost of the invasions, by offering new explanatory schemes of religious (instead of political) prevalence, even in the occupied areas. Furthermore, they might have served "as a kind of prototype of the Christian-Muslim disputation texts which begin to appear not long afterwards" as Cameron claimed.¹⁰¹¹ As is well-known, "new genres do not emerge overnight"¹⁰¹² and anti-Judaic dialogues, as well as the Monothelete disputation (it should be mentioned here that Déroche has named Anastasius' *Viae dux* as the fountain of the new style of anti-Judaic treatises), paved the way for and directed the expression of the objections and polemic towards Muslims into a well-established and refined literary genre.

From the available textual evidence of that period,¹⁰¹³ it seems that, what "at least a portion of the Jewish community"¹⁰¹⁴ really did share with certain Christians were the eschatological expectations and apocalyptic visions (although for completely different reasons, with the invasions being the counterpoint of this development); and quite reasonably in a period of fluidity, they also shared religious polemics and division, high tensions, uncertainty and fear. As Jewish hopes for restoration subsided due to the establishment of a new regime and a subsequent new religion, it was the Christians that turned to eschatological and apocalyptic explanations for consolation from the persisting reality.

¹⁰¹⁰ Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 87.

¹⁰¹¹ Cameron, "Jews in Palestine," 86.

¹⁰¹² Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 83, (referring to Harris' "Article on the Triune Nature of God").

¹⁰¹³ About the Hebrew apocalyptic texts, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 307-321; and Lewis, Bernard "On That Day: a Jewish Apocalyptic Poem on the Arab Conquests," in Salmon, Pierre (ed.) *Mélanges d'Islamologie: volume dédié à la mémoire de Armand Abel*, Leiden 1974, 197-200; now repr. in idem, *Studies*, VI.

¹⁰¹⁴ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 308.

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